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THE TRAGEDY OF JOHN RUSKIN

By the Same Author

★

NOAH'S ARK
THE WALL OF GLASS
BUT WE KNOW BETTER

★

In collaboration with
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THE PLEASURES OF ARCHITECTURE

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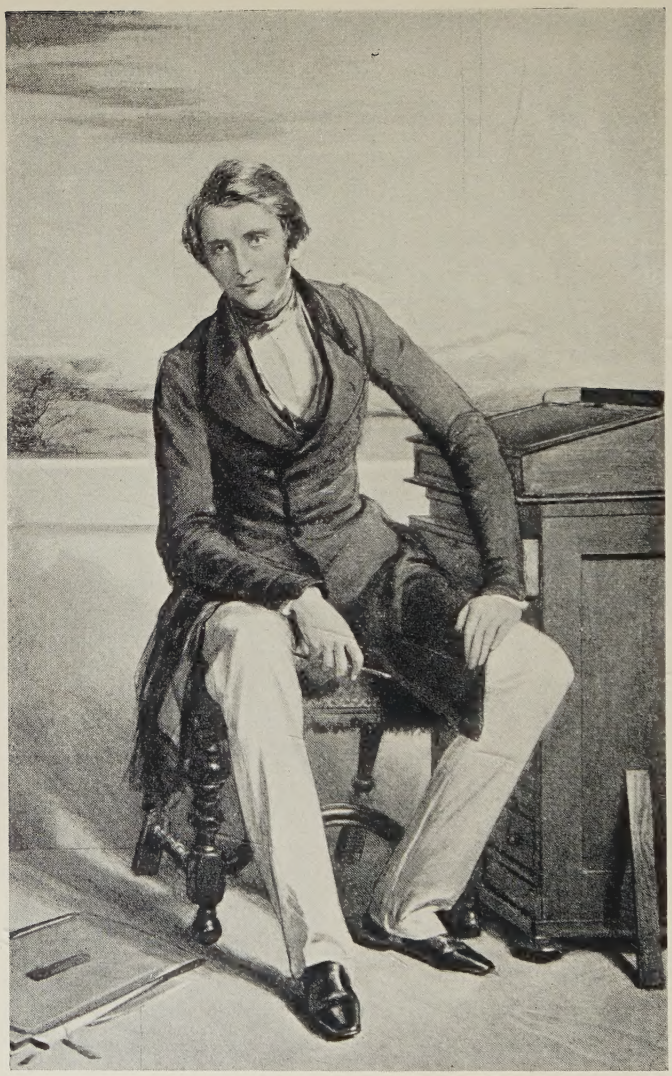

JOHN RUSKIN, 1843

From a portrait by G. Richmond

THE TRAGEDY OF

JOHN RUSKIN

by

AMABEL WILLIAMS-ELLIS

'It is an exquisite piece of Tragedy altogether –
very much like Lear, in a ludicrous
commercial way . . .'
JOHN RUSKIN

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TO CHRISTOPHER

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

§ 1

THOUGH dogma and taboo certainly exist in England and America to-day, they occupy a much less dominating place than they did a generation ago, or than they may occupy a generation hence. For this reason, we, in the third decade of the twentieth century, when we want to decide what is right, or wrong, or good, or not good, to be done, are apt to turn to experience.

Even if we look back no farther than the last century and the streets and hills that we know, we see that all sorts of men have tried all sorts of ways of living. There seems to be an infinite combination of characters, fates, and opinions. We feel that if only history were more reliable, and biographers and autobiographers more honest and industrious, we might really be able, by tracing out the curves of experience in the past, to decide some of the problems which come up for solution in the present, and can no longer be decided by reference to an accepted code.

What sort of upbringing will fit such or such a child for such or such a life?

Is strictness or freedom best in love?

How much money or how much leisure ought people to have?

How hard ought people to work for their livings?

Is the best intellectual work done in solitude, or must there be the restriction and stimulation of working with colleagues?

Then, behind all these respectable conundrums, there is the insistent and monotonous question that we are really asking. What we really ask all the time, when we ask

experience for its verdict on right and wrong, is how we can get out of suffering this or that terrible pain, how we can avoid the disappointment, loneliness or disaster that we see in other people's lives. We want desperately to be happy, or perhaps to shield a child from the agonies that twist some people, or – horrible thought – is it most people, at some time in their lives.

When we are young we are sure that we shall manage splendidly, and shall succeed in giving the slip to pain and humiliation. As we grow older we know that it cannot be done. Finally, some men and women no longer want to avoid such things, but are able to grasp all experience and build with it.

§ 2

John Ruskin was an exceedingly brilliant child, who was subjected to a perfectly consistent system of education.

He became one of the most famous men of his century, and his story is in nothing more moving than in the massive publicity and outward decorum in which it was played.

His life and work had a considerable effect on the lives and ideals of the last generation, not only in England but in Europe and America. Not only yards of bookshelf, and miles of picture gallery, but the configuration of whole towns can be traced to his opinions.

Nor is his influence merely a petrified and inanimate one. Ruskin lives on obscurely in the memory of the people. Visit an English manufacturing town, and you may quite likely find that the Labour Club is called Ruskin Hall. Here not only are meetings held, but billiards are played and beer is drunk in his name, much as the stalls and side-shows of an old English fair were set up in the name of Virgin or saint.

William Morris, with what might have seemed much more popular attributes, lives chiefly in the minds of people

who have read something that he wrote, or who at any rate know something about him. That is a narrow immortality.

Ruskin the art critic, the man who called his books by Latin names, lives like the saints. He is held in the memory of poor people who only have a vague impression of somebody with a high cravat and whiskers, who came down notably on their side. Fame so vague is almost indestructible.

As his story unfolds, we try to bear in mind his renown when living, and now this wide and touching immortality. For of his achievements we must ask whether they justify the tragedy of his life. Are we to curse, or bless, the pain that quickened him to such exquisite expression, and then drove him down, till, again and again, he 'tasted Nebuchadnezzar's bitter grass' and went through the complex and terrible ordeals of madness?

§ 3

Ruskin's curious and obscure emotional history, and his views about the living world that surrounded him, are told with some fullness in the pages that follow.

The reader who wishes to study his views on painting, architecture, religion, geology, and engraving, will not find what he wants here, but is referred to Mr. Collingwood's charming two-volume biography. The general student of his friendships with the notables of his day, and of his influence on his contemporaries, is advised to consult Sir E. T. Cook's very full *Life*. These books, together with Ruskin's exquisite fragment of autobiography, *Præterita*; his letters, his works, contemporary memoirs, and verbal tradition, form the sources of the present study.

But here several important aspects of Ruskin's work will be found only to have been glanced at. The first place has been given to his history, and the psychological problems which it presents; and the second to his style and his politics.

To the present writer, in spite of the strangeness of the mercantile Victorian England to which this story takes us back, in spite of the remoteness of many of the dilemmas which beset him, the story of John Ruskin's life seems present and living.

AMABEL WILLIAMS-ELLIS

PLÂS BRONDANW

PART I

CHAPTER I

Circa 1825: Age 6

A FRONTISPIECE

§ 1

Outside the sun is shining, and Papa has gone down to the counting-house in Billiter Street. Indoors John Ruskin, aged six, sits on a low stool with an open Bible on his knee, and sees nothing but that, and his mother's wide maroon skirt. He is trying to concentrate on what she is reading. This is in the first place because he is a dutiful little boy, and in the second, because he will have to read the next verse and must come in at the right time. The idea of not reading the next verse has never yet entered his head.

Though the doings of Jeroboam and Rehoboam occupy most of his attention, visions of Conway Castle flit about the back of the little boy's mind. Papa had told him a story about it while he shaved that morning. They had been looking, as they always did, at that water-colour drawing in a gold frame which Papa had made when he was young. Did the fisherman live in the cottage? John had asked. Where was he going in the boat? What sort of fish did he try to catch? Who lived in Conway Castle?

But the verse is drawing to an end. '. . . with eight hun-

dred thousand chosen men, being mighty men of valourr . . .' Margaret Ruskin's voice, sounding out above her little boy's bent head, says the word distinctly, and with a perceptible Scotch burr. John manages to get back away from Conway and to pick up the reading without too perceptible a pause.

'And Abijah,' reads John, 'stood up upon Mount Zemaraim, which is in Mount Ephraim, and said, Hear me, thou Jeroboam, and all Israel.' It is a lovely childish voice, as clear as a blackbird's, and it reproduces the Scotch intonation exactly.

When his mother takes it up – 'Ought ye not to know that the Lord God of Israel gave up the kingdom . . .' – the little boy began to blame himself for his inattention. 'Ought ye not?' . . . Ought ye not to have attended . . . ? Attended to God's word?

John's oddly bright blue eyes glance up at his mother as she sits with folded hands, her body rising erect above the cascades of dark red merino, the whole impressive figure crowned with a white frilled cap with strings. No, it is all right, he thinks. She only looks stern, not angry.

§ 2

Lift the curtain a year later, two years later, three years later, and you may see the same group engaged in the same employment; but the chapter may be the Levitical Law or a genealogical table. For Margaret Ruskin took her son steadily back and forth through every word of the Bible, from the time he could read almost to the time he went to Oxford.

There was but one change. When John was nine, Mary, an exceedingly good little orphan cousin, four years older than he, was added to the party. The fact was scarcely remarkable to John. It hardly meant more than that he had to read every third instead of every other verse.

§ 3

By twelve o'clock the little boy's lessons were always over, and he might go into the Herne Hill garden – an Eden to him, and an Eden in which not only apples, but all fruit was forbidden. There was no serpent, it is true, but also there were no companionable beasts. John had neither puppy nor cat, rat nor rabbit. It was a pleasant suburban garden – seventy yards long and twenty yards wide, and known all over Herne Hill for its pears and apples, and for its gooseberry and currant bushes. But the gardener would not leave even the ants' nests undisturbed for him, while the back door was a mockery, for the cook might not give him so much as a baked potato.

Presently Mamma would come out too, and would move about planting and pruning in the garden beside him. Her presence was, as he says, no particular pleasure, for he had his own affairs to see after; and by the time he was seven years old, was already getting very independent mentally, even of his father and mother. He had no one else to be dependent upon –

> [1]'I began (he says) to lead a very small, perky, contented, conceited, cock-Robinson Crusoe sort of life, the central point of which, it appeared to me (as it must naturally appear to geometrical animals), that I occupied in the universe.'

In the afternoon, punctually at half-past four, Papa, the sherry merchant, came back from the City, perhaps with a new number of *Noctes Ambrosianæ* or *Pickwick* in his pocket, or a new volume of *Waverley*. Then he would dine solemnly in the front parlour with Mamma sitting beside him to hear the events of the day, and to give counsel and encouragement. She was chiefly called upon for encouragement,

[1] *Præterita.*

for Papa was apt to be vexed if orders for sherry fell the least short even for a day or two. From this formal consultation his parents emerged at about six o'clock, and John joined them. If it was summer they would go out into the garden, where they would have tea under the whiteheart cherry. In winter tea would be in the drawing-room, and John always had his cup of milk, and slice of bread-and-butter, in a little recess with a table in front of it. There, well out of the way of draughts, he stayed till bedtime, sitting like an idol in a niche, while Mamma knitted and Papa read to her and to John (so far as John chose to listen). It might be *Waverley*, it might be *Don Quixote*, and often it was *Don Juan* – published the year Ruskin was born. But even if it was Byron, only the very worst of the naughty parts would be left out. Often John would not listen to the reading, but would draw or write, or read one of the three or four children's books which he had – something of Maria Edgeworth's, or perhaps the *Comical Adventures of Dame Wiggins of Lee*, or, in a more elevated mood, a volume of *Forget-me-not* or the *Continental Annual*. Here, too, he would write, pouring out prose and verses, for which his parents paid him so much a page or a line.

Their routine was sometimes broken by a visit to aunts and cousins at Croydon, or aunts and cousins at Perth, by dinners given to clients and other people connected with the sherry business, and regularly, once a year, by a 'TOUR.'

§ 4

Then Mr. Telford, his father's partner, would lend his chariot, and posting horses would be procured. The pockets and boxes under the seats would be provided with books (always the chief travelling necessity for the Ruskins), the luggage would be stowed away in the dickey behind, little John's box would be packed, and the cushion on which

he was to sit would be strapped on to it; the steps would be let down, Papa and Mamma, quite unflustered, would get in, and John would be handed up to them. The steps would be folded, the door shut, Anne, his nurse, would clamber into the dickey behind, the postilion would crack his whip, and off they would go on a month's tour.

The direction which this tour was to take was determined upon two principles: first, the exigencies of the sherry trade (for travelling for orders was the chief purpose of the journey); and, second, the search for romantic scenery and the houses of the nobility. Mrs. Ruskin sat bolt upright in the chariot. 'I have seen her,' wrote John Ruskin, 'travel from sunrise to sunset on a summer's day without once leaning back.' But as a rule, while John was young, they did not make a very long day of it, but travelled only forty or fifty miles. This left them ample time for looking at crags, torrents, and ruined abbeys, or the Vandykes and Reynoldses that lay sequestered in some gentleman's seat among chestnuts and browsing deer.

§ 5

It was a strange life that the Ruskins led, even in that age of eccentricity and family solitude. But just as Ruskin the man grew logically out of little John and his 'Cock-Robinson Crusoe' existence, so his parents' unremitting devotion and interference seem the inevitable outcome of their own history and times.

It is to the lives, then, of Ruskin's father and mother, James Ruskin and Margaret Cox, the two powerful cousins, that we must turn back if we are to understand, and still more to excuse, a great deal of what went on in Billiter Street and at Herne Hill.

As Ruskin's own life unfolds before the reader, he will see how necessary a key to most of its eccentricities is afforded,

not only by an understanding of his childhood, but by the retrospect upon which the next chapter conducts him. We must excuse and understand the parents a little, and even sympathize with them, if the story of their brilliant son, and what they made of him, is to be read with patience.

We shall find that there is something wraith-like in the rainbow figure of Carlyle's 'ethereal Ruskin,' and it is the resolute shapes of the old sherry merchant and his wife that we see behind, when at any time their famous child seems to us to grow insubstantial and to thin out into a beautiful voice.

CHAPTER II

Circa 1740–1818: Origins

RUSKIN'S ORIGINS

§ 1

THACKERAY has told us how much shocked the Evangelical Pitt Crawley was by his father, old Sir Pitt. Queen Victoria, as Lytton Strachey reminds us, might once (had Melbourne's influence continued) have turned back and become a gay, coarse Hanoverian. There was, in short, a period in the late seventeen-nineties and early eighteen hundreds, when in almost every family in England, the gusty wind of the Regency met the tide of the iron age of steam and sobriety.

If John Ruskin's parents were so extremely respectable, so very honest, so very serious, it was partly because they had both in their own persons experienced certain very disagreeable effects of an opposite way of living – James, of a hard-drinking and pedantically intellectual society, and Margaret Cox, of downright vulgarity and low life.

§ 2

Though those who knew her in middle life found it hard to credit, Mrs. Ruskin was the daughter of a Yarmouth sea captain, and when he died of an accident about 1789, Mrs. Cox supported herself and her two daughters by keeping the King's Head Inn and Tavern at Croydon.

But Mrs. Cox did not mean to go down in the world more than she was obliged, and sent Margaret and her little sister Bridget to Mrs. Rice's fashionable day-school, a place where they could be taught needlework and strict Evangelical principles.

If we feel inclined to brand Mrs. Cox immediately as a prig and a snob, we are to remember in extenuation what a brandy-and-water, Handley Cross sort of an atmosphere was close at hand in the life of the inn and market. It was not a very kid-glove business for any woman to keep an inn at that place and time, and if we may later be led to think that Mrs. Cox went too far in trying to make her daughters genteel, it was probably done in a not unnatural revulsion from the too great realism of her means of livelihood.

Nor was Mrs. Cox altogether or disgustingly successful. True, Margaret Cox, Ruskin's mother, became the pattern girl and the best needlewoman in Mrs. Rice's school. Nature had made her a proud, powerful girl, and the school made her a strong Evangelical and a thorough housewife. But Bridget, her younger sister, frivolously refused both needlework and Evangelical principles, and, probably to Margaret's bewilderment, was loved by both the girls and mistresses very much better than her sister. As Margaret grew on into her teens, she became more and more fixed in 'her entirely conscientious career,'[1] while her sister Bridget poked fun at her. Such were the origins of Ruskin's mother.

§ 3

Now, Mrs. Cox, the landlady, had a brother who was destined to be the famous Ruskin's grandfather as well as his great-uncle. This John Ruskin lived in Edinburgh, had his son's portrait painted by Raeburn, and was first a man of parts, and only secondly a wine merchant. While he

[1] *Præterita.*

enjoyed the company of his friends, the wine trade was largely left to itself. His son, James, found himself as quite a boy trying to make him pay more attention to his business, and less to the pedantic wits of Edinburgh. But the boy had very little success. His father grew crotchety and quarrelsome as well as self-indulgent, and the tangle grew as the years passed. Nobody in the house seems to have been very efficient except James. His mother, Catherine, who had bolted with her John at sixteen, did not run her house very well.

At last the Ruskins seem to have felt that if the wine business was in confusion, at least the house must be comfortable and dinners must be given efficiently. Though somehow under Catherine the house did not run smooth.

So when their niece, Margaret Cox, was twenty, they sent for her to leave the 'King's Head' and to come and keep her Aunt Catherine's house. Thus it happened that that sincere Evangelical and exemplary young housewife set off one day in the Edinburgh coach and did not see Croydon again for twenty years. When she went, her sister Bridget, with 'more wit, less pride, and no conscience,' became as one relieved of a weight. Throwing away all the ladylike precepts of Mrs. Rice's fashionable day-school, she married the baker and went to live over the shop.

Her sister Margaret, once arrived in Scotland, soon set her uncle and aunt's house in order, and became the head of all domestic affairs.

Now at last her young cousin, James Ruskin, had an ally. Margaret was all on the side of economy, all on the side of the most scrupulous attention to business: they could agree as to how dreadful the consequences would be if somebody did not soon pull the wine business together, and how hard it was for a family to depend on a man who did not know his mind two hours together. The truth was that Margaret was obliged to hold such opinions, for she found herself once

more in the position of not being able to shine except by superior virtue. She did not very much care for the conversation which she heard in the Athens of the North. They quoted Latin and read political economy. Except for godliness she was out of it, and could not match herself against them any more than she had been able to compete against Bridget. This repetition of the situation set her character for ever. She had got on, she had been the pattern girl at Mrs. Rice's academy at Croydon. There she had had to live down being the daughter of the landlady of the 'King's Head' and less pretty and amusing than Bridget. She had learnt her lessons and held her head high, and above all she had been pious. And now here, in Edinburgh, all this was no good at all – here she had to live down having been the head girl of a fashionable young ladies' school at Croydon. To a girl of Margaret's temperament the situation was tragic. The double set of difficulties, and the consciousness of something strong and remarkable in herself, gave her a set-back from which she never recovered. She was proud, sensitive, and vigorous, and twice circumstances had put her at a social disadvantage.

Here, she must have reflected, was her uncle, the old wine merchant, who was so crotchety and unreliable, and yet nobody seemed to think the worse of him. Still, she could, and did, solace herself by thoughts of her moral superiority to him. On the other hand, here was her cousin, James, four years her junior, who was as Evangelical and moral as she was. But he got on socially as well as his father, acted in private theatricals to everybody's admiration, and knew Latin, mathematics, and political economy. How could she hope to compete here? It is in her attitude to James Ruskin that Margaret's stern competitive character is seen at its best. She felt herself hopelessly outclassed by James and fell back, not on jealousy or denigration, but on a warm and even passionate love. To the end of her life she was to

love and admire this young cousin as the most gifted, most virtuous, and most delightful of human beings.

As he grew older James became, as has been said, worried over the humiliating confusion of the wine business, and used to take refuge with Margaret. They had a great deal in common, for both of them were upright, literal and direct, and they were both finding how hard it can be to manage obstinate elders. Certainly, thought Margaret, James was far above her, for he painted in water-colours, acted, and knew things which had never been heard of in Mrs. Rice's school. But they had this in common – each could believe completely and utterly every word the other said. Between the cousins there was no 'getting at' the truth, no sacrifice of self-respect for the sake of indolence or good company.

It was agreed in some sort of a family council that, in order that he should be a fit heir for his father's business, James must go away and learn the wine trade thoroughly. He therefore resolved to go to London. So for a long while he left Edinburgh and his cousin Margaret, only coming home very occasionally. It was after he had been for two years learning the business that he 'came to an understanding' with Margaret on one of these visits home. 'My father,' declared Ruskin, 'chose his wife with much the same kind of serenity and decision with which afterwards he chose his clerks.' [1] Margaret was not the least an ideal heroine to him, but they were well used to each other, and in a quiet but resolute way he asked her if she would marry him, and moreover if she would wait until he had an independence to offer her.

> [2] 'His early tutress (Ruskin goes on) consented with frankly confessed joy, . . . feeling and admitting that it was a great delight to be allowed to love him. . . . My mother was perhaps the more deeply in love, while

[1] *Præterita.* [2] *Ibid.*

James depended more absolutely on her sympathy and wise friendship than is at all usual with young men of the present day, in their relations with admired young ladies. But neither of them ever permitted their feelings to degenerate into fretful or impatient passion. My mother showed her affection chiefly in steady endeavour to cultivate her powers of mind, and form her manners, so as to fit herself to be the undespised companion of a man whom she considered much her superior: my father in unremitting attention to the business on the success of which his marriage depended, and in a methodical regularity of conduct and correspondence which never left his mistress a moment of avoidable anxiety, or gave her motive for any serious displeasure.'

While James was thus in London, working as a clerk in the house of Gordon Murphy & Co., he had as an office colleague a Monsieur Domecq, a young man of about his own age, half Spanish and half French, and owner of a famous sherry vineyard in Spain. A partnership was arranged, and a new firm came into being, Ruskin, Telford & Domecq.

1809 was an odd year to choose for the foundation of such a firm, for it was the year of Corunna, and all that year and the next Wellesley and Soult marched and counter-marched about the Peninsula. Peace in fact was not signed in Spain till 1814 brought the abdication of Napoleon. The little circumstance of the war is, by the way, not glanced at by Ruskin in any of his accounts of his father's early struggles, nor does it appear to have affected the prosperity of the sherry trade. Domecq, Ruskin tells us, contributed the sherry, Mr. Henry Telford the capital, and James Ruskin the brains.

But unfortunately old John Ruskin's health and affairs had by this time both gone completely wrong. The old

merchant, who had more or less retired from active business and had settled near Perth, died, and James found that he had left not a business, but heavy debts, behind him. James, characteristically sensitive, at once undertook to pay off his father's creditors with his share of the proceeds of the new London firm. This was a heartbreaking piece of work, and meant that James Ruskin had to exercise superhuman economy and energy. To save charges he himself managed the firm's correspondence, he travelled for orders, arranged the importation, and himself directed the growers out in Spain. (We are not told if a disregard of the war formed part of his instructions.) Gradually, at any rate, he built up a fine business, paid off his father's debts, and established a home for Margaret Cox.

But this hard task took him nine years, and his health never quite recovered from the prodigious efforts that he made at this time. Not only did he hurt his health, but he formed habits then which were to prove a fetter to him in later life, for during the time he worked with a restricted staff, he forgot, if he had ever learnt, how to devolve. He had run the business so long alone that not only did he go on managing every detail himself, but it became painful to him to have competent clerks. His son, John Ruskin, says of him that he always hampered himself by choosing clerks for their obedience and powers of subordinating themselves, and not for their capacity. He goes on to remark (with one of those flashes of character analysis that often make the discursive pages of *Præterita* such startling reading) that, when James Ruskin was a successful man, his more gloomy conferences with his wife were often concerned with the shortcomings of subordinates, whom he had chosen chiefly because they could never be his rivals.

But this accession of pettiness was not the only harm that James Ruskin suffered. For nine years he worked too hard to make friends, worked hard enough to make himself grow

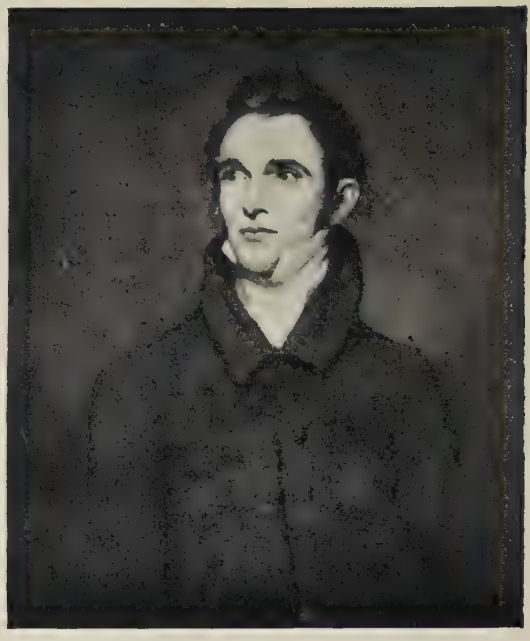
shy and lose most of the sparkle that had made him charming when Raeburn painted him. He gave up chemistry and political economy. He had been obliged by his code of duty to see himself shrink in the years when he should have grown. He felt his wider powers diminish, he gave up knowledge and the arts. Is it any wonder that such a man made extravagant claims for his son, that riches so made were intended to allow his son to satisfy every claim of taste and knowledge?

§ 4

James Ruskin, then, sacrificed health, ease, and society, to paying off his father's debts and making a fortune; he gave up his early hopes of practising the arts, but there was one sacrifice he did not make: he remained an onlooker. He still painted in water-colours, and 'drew charmingly' in Indian ink: he read all the new and fashionable books while they were still damp from the press. He loved landscape and architecture, and, whether he travelled in Scotland or in Spain, was a diligent sightseer.

But if he still retained a little of a scholar and the man of taste, yet when he was satisfied that prudence and honour allowed, and when he went to Perth to claim Margaret's hand, his youth and hers had gone: he was thirty-three, and she thirty-seven. She seems to have set even more than he had. In that household of debts and discomforts, her natural prudence had become almost an obsession. She feared that it was still too soon. However, with the minister's help, her Cousin James persuaded her one evening into a marriage in the Scottish fashion. None of the servants knew anything about it until next morning, and then Mr. and Mrs. James Ruskin drove off and posted to their new house at 54, Hunter Street, Brunswick Square.

But it was not only for James Ruskin that the tide had



THE PARENTS OF JOHN RUSKIN

From portraits by James Northcote

turned towards prosperity. Three years after Waterloo the forces of reaction were established on the Continent, and the freer merchants of England were beginning to believe that a millennium was coming if only the labourers could be kept down. In 1818 the Industrial Revolution had begun in this country alone, and the industrialists were coining money. The new industry was being almost frankly established on the basis of exploited labour, while the sufferings of the labourers – men, women, and children – were set off by the rise of the new middle class, and accounted for by the new political economy. The 'combination laws' which forbade the formation of trade unions had been passed by Pitt as a war measure, but had not been repealed.

The day of the hard road and of rapid coaches and posting had come, and Cobbett rode angrily on these new roads, watching over the hedge how the commons were being enclosed. But for the most part the signs of the times had not become visible, and England was still the England of Nash and almost of the Adams. Only there was a new pleasant jingle in middle-class pockets.

But it was not an age merely of cakes and ale for the rich. A new seriousness was, as has been suggested, observable in the middle-class life of the country. Margaret Ruskin was just as typical of her age in big things in being an Evangelical, as she was to be in small, when, half a dozen years later, she moved out of the neighbourhood of Brunswick Square to a neat stucco villa in Dulwich.

CHAPTER III

1819–1826: Birth to 7 years

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

§ 1

At 54, Hunter Street, Brunswick Square, then, on the 8th of February, 1819, the Ruskins' only child was born. They named him John.

The house had a certain decorum, but there was not much more to be said for it. It was one of a row, built of yellow London brick, grave, monotonous, and inoffensive.

However, before little John was two, he had discovered its one great attraction.

> [1] 'Fortunately for me (he says) the windows of it commanded a view of a marvellous iron post, out of which the water-carts were filled through beautiful little trap-doors by pipes like boaconstrictors; and I was never weary of contemplating that mystery and the delicious drippings consequent . . . besides, there were the still more admirable proceedings of the turncock who turned and turned until a fountain sprang up in the middle of the street.'

No doubt any child would have loved those water-carts and that fountain: how much more John, who (at two) was allowed no toys of any kind – only a bunch of keys. John

[1] *Præterita.*

was whipped when he fell downstairs, and was once allowed to burn himself on the hot bright urn to teach him how deceitful the world is.

Margaret Ruskin had, indeed, as she afterwards told him, already devoted her little boy to God before he was born, in imitation of Hannah.

> [1] 'Very good women (says Ruskin) are remarkably apt to make away with their children prematurely in this manner. . . . "Devoting me to God" meant, as far as my mother knew herself what she meant, that she would try to send me to college, and make a clergyman of me.'

But not a clergyman merely: for after all they had gone through, if God was going to have Margaret Ruskin's son, He must make a bishop of him at the least. However, he was so early taken to church, was so soon bored with long sermons, so indefatigably fed with cold mutton on Sundays, so sternly had all his picture-books taken away on that frightful day, that he never felt a call to the ministry.

From time to time, when his father was ill, they drove away from Hunter Street, and went down to Market Street, Croydon, to be petted by Aunt Bridget. Aunt Bridget, the reader will remember, was Margaret's pretty young sister, who had resisted Evangelical theology and gentility, and – witty and kind as a burgess's wife as she had been as a schoolgirl – lived over the shop with her baker, and her children. There was a dog called Towser at Aunt Bridget's.

> [2] 'She had taken pity on him when he was a snappish starved vagrant, and made a brave and affectionate dog – which was the kind of thing she did for every living creature that came in her way all her life long.'

Aunt Bridget was very sorry that John should be allowed

[1] *Præterita.* [2] *Ibid.*

no toys; so on one of his birthdays she tried to get round her sister by giving so beautiful a present that she felt sure even Margaret would not have the heart to refuse it.

> 'She bought (Ruskin says) the most radiant Punch and Judy she could find in all the Soho bazaar, . . . all dressed in scarlet and gold, and that would dance, tied to the leg of a chair. . . . My aunt herself exhibited their virtues, my mother was obliged to accept them; but afterwards she quietly told me it was not right that I should have them, and I never saw them again.'

As he grew older Ruskin was allowed a cart and a ball, and when he was five or six years old, two boxes of well-cut wooden bricks. That was all.

§ 2

Occasional visits to cousins gave him a taste of child companionship. For there were not only the Croydon cousins, but there was his father's sister in Perth whom they occasionally went to see. But till he was four or five, John, like most other children of that age, was quite happy alone.

> 'I could pass my days contentedly (he says) in tracing the squares and comparing the colours of my carpet – examining the knots in the wood of the floor, or counting the bricks in the opposite houses. . . . The carpet and what patterns I could find in bed-covers, dresses, or wall-papers, were my chief resources, and my attention to the particulars of these was soon so accurate that when, at three and a half, I was taken to have my portrait painted by Mr. Northcote, I had not been ten minutes alone with him before I asked him why there were holes in his carpet.'

Northcote, that crabbed old cynic and satirist, asked his sitter in the blue sash what he would have as a background to the picture. The child replied, 'Blue hills' – an answer of which he was later very proud. The idea of distant hills was connected in his mind 'with approach to the extreme felicities of life in my Scotch aunt's garden of gooseberries sloping to the Tay.' But that he should have asked for 'blue hills' instead of 'gooseberry bushes' appeared to him later as prophetic. He had been so 'steadily whipped' if he was troublesome as to make an excellent sitter, and pleased Northcote so much that he used him again as a model.

One of the felicities of his aunt's house at Perth were his little cousins, and especially one little cousin of his own age named Jessie, whom he loved dearly. His Perth uncle was a tanner, and not apparently very agreeable. At least Ruskin seems to have ranked the fact that his father's sister should have been allowed to marry such a man as an example of the incompetencies and irregularities of his grandfather's household.

§ 3

The prosperity in the sherry business which had made James feel justified in marrying Margaret proved steady and lasting. So in 1823, when Ruskin was four, they moved to a new house in Dulwich.

It is here that we come back to the picture of Ruskin and his mother, reading their Bible and leading year after year their strange scheduled life.

§ 4

John Ruskin was never allowed cake or sweets and scarcely any fruit, and his recollection of any relaxation of the

rule is pathetic, as, for instance, of a day when his mother gave him three raisins out of the store-cupboard.

But there were less wholesome restrictions than this. He was never allowed to go to the edge of the pond or to be in the same field as the pony, and so when they all went to Croydon he was never allowed to go out alone with his cousins in case they should lead him into mischief. He writes wistfully in *Præterita* of the forbidden pleasures of boating and swimming. On the yearly Tours, of which mention was made in the first chapter, the Ruskins would often stay in some coast town. Ruskin would stare for hours at the sea, but was not allowed any closer contact with it.

> [1] 'I was not allowed to row, far less to sail, nor to walk near the harbour alone; so that I learned nothing of shipping or anything else worth learning, but spent four or five hours every day in simply staring and wondering at the sea – an occupation which never failed me till I was forty.'

But he was not a nervous child, 'and feared neither ghosts, thunder, nor beasts,' and when, in his fifties, he came to recall his childhood, he could not recollect having been nervous of anything except foxglove dells, and of the smooth swirls of black flowing water near his aunt's house where the Tay 'gathered herself like Medusa.' But when he was five, an incident happened which might well have been alarming. They had a black Newfoundland watch-dog, and after one of the summer Tours in Mr. Telford's carriage, the little boy's first thought on getting home was to see Lion. Thomas, the manservant, carried him out into the stable-yard to see the dog. Lion was at his dinner, and took no notice. John begged leave to pat him. Thomas stooped down, when the dog instantly flew at the child and bit a

[1] *Præterita.*

piece clean out of the corner of his lip on the left side. He was carried up the back stairs bleeding fast but not frightened, except lest Lion should be sent away. Lion had to go, but Mrs. Ruskin 'would not send away Thomas, for she was sure he was sorry.' But the bitten side of the child's mouth was spoilt for ever, and it was often supposed that Ruskin had been born with a hare-lip.

This affair with Lion was not his only adventure, for once he fell head-first into a large water-tub, kept for watering the garden. But what were rain-water tubs and dog bites? The Perth cousins were brave, the Croydon cousins braver. Cousin Charles of Croydon had been thrown into the canal by his elder brother and taught to swim like that. He had been put on the back of a small shaggy pony and told by the same brother that he would be whipped if he fell off; and in this way he had learned to ride and swim. Mrs. Ruskin used to tell the story and look with pride at her own little boy, kept so safely and carefully.

It is perhaps in their encouragement of their little boy's lisping numbers that the pathos of his parents' starved lives comes out most strongly. As Mr. Laurence Binyon truly says, James Ruskin 'had a private passion for romance and worshipped art and poetry with a real and innocent reverence.' And it was not long before he and Margaret believed that their son had quite unusual talents, while nothing in the educational theory of the day made them dread precocity.

So his parents cheered John Ruskin's childish hand. From the time he was seven or eight, it traced indefatigably, line upon line of verse, page upon page of prose. The little boy's work was always accurate, often vigorous, but with no spark of fun anywhere, and very seldom the least originality. They paid him a halfpenny a page for copying out Pope's *Homer* and a penny for every twenty lines of composition.

§ 5

Ruskin, in *Fors Clavigera*, writing odd snatches to tell his disciples what sort of man he was, sums up with an almost more than modern detachment what he came to see as the advantages and calamities of this strange rigid childhood. Beginning with the blessings, he puts first that he was taught the advantages of peace in act, thought and word: that he never heard an angry voice, never saw the least household disorder, anxiety, or even hurry. He counts as an advantage, too, that he never was aware of any financial trouble, because his father never spent more than half his income. Again, he counts it as a blessing that he learnt obedience and faith, and 'obeyed word or lifted finger of father or mother as simply as a ship obeys her helm.'

He says that at this age he never had done any wrong as far as he knew and so had no remorse.

> 'Nothing (he goes on) was ever promised me that was not given, nothing ever threatened me that was not inflicted, nothing ever told me that was not true.'

He counts also as a blessing the habit of fixed attention of both eyes and mind which his mother's discipline taught him. The enforced asceticism for which Aunt Bridget had so pitied him gave him, he says, an extreme perfection in palate and all other bodily senses.

But here he ends his list.

Against these blessings he sets off a list of calamities, of which the first and greatest was that he had nothing to love.

> [1] 'My parents were – in a sort – visible powers of nature to me, no more loved than the sun and the moon; . . . still less did I love God. Not that I had any

[1] *Præterita.*

JOHN RUSKIN, AGED $3\frac{1}{2}$ YEARS

From a portrait by James Northcote

> quarrel with Him or fear of Him; but simply found what people told me was His service, disagreeable; and what people told me was His book, not entertaining. I had no companions to quarrel with neither; nobody to assist, and nobody to thank. . . . When affection did come, it came with violence utterly rampant and unmanageable, at least by me, who never before had anything to manage.'

As the second misfortune of his childhood he ranks the fact that he had nothing to endure. Third, that he was taught no 'precision or etiquette of manners,' but only to behave unobtrusively.

He was not shy as a small boy, but when shyness came with adolescence he had no pretty behaviour with which to cover himself. He says that later he grew conscious of certain rudeness arising from a want of social discipline, and having been unused to the learning of any bodily skill, found it impossible to learn to dance or to play games, 'or even ease and tact in ordinary behaviour.'

As last of evils, he ranks the fact that though this 'cock-Robinson Crusoe' of a John Ruskin had too much independence of thought, he had none of action.

'The bridle and blinkers were never taken off me.'

He thought later a great deal about education, and writes with strong disapproval of this sort of way of bringing up children. The opposite way should be taken, he thinks.

> [1] 'The little creature should be very early put for periods of practice in complete command of itself; set on the bare-backed horse of its own will . . . but my education at that time . . . was at once too formal and too luxurious; leaving my character . . . cramped indeed, but not disciplined; and only by protection innocent, instead of by practice virtuous.'

[1] *Præterita.*

CHAPTER IV

Circa 1824–1833: Aged 5–14

FIRST LOVE

§ 1

The tragic summary and analysis that Ruskin made of his own childhood need no comment. But Ruskin has left out a circumstance which was hinted at in the last chapter which will seem to a reader of to-day (used to the leisurely modern methods of education), another fault: that was his parents' encouragement of the child's natural precocity. By the time he was five Ruskin tells us that he was already 'sending to the library for his second volume.'

His first piece of literary work was a continuation of Miss Edgeworth's story of *Frank, Harry and Lucy*, a tale which he combined with edifying facts out of Joyce's *Scientific Dialogues*. It was prophetic of Ruskin's later career, that of this work four volumes were projected and one and a quarter accomplished. He wrote it in a neat imitation of printing, and it is much concerned with an electrical apparatus which Harry's father had given him, and which became alternatively positively and negatively electrified.

But by nine years old he was writing in the style of Pope, or Young, with incredible, even maddening correctness:

> 'When first the wrath of Heaven o'erwhelmed the world,
> And o'er the rocks, and hills, and mountains, hurl'd

The waters' gathering mass; and sea o'er shore –
The mountains fell, and vales, unknown before,
Lay where they were. Far different was the Earth
When first the flood came down, than at its second birth.'

Nearly 220 lines of this poem were written, and Ruskin suggests that the ones quoted were of average quality. The child's dexterity is appalling, but it was not much wonder that James and Margaret Ruskin supposed that they had a phœnix in their nest.

But though James Ruskin treasured every word that his son wrote, talked to his friends about his poems and stories, alluded to them in letters to Scottish men of letters, and carried his favourite poems about in his pocket-book, there seems no evidence that John Ruskin ever wrote more than one poem of the slightest merit. When he was eleven, however, he experienced his first sorrow when his little cousin Jessie died at Perth. The modern reader will probably agree that these lines not only express a very real emotion, but have a genuine beauty:

[1] '. . . O ye winds of heaven, breathe in melancholy notes a song of death!
Youth is departed; beauty is withered in the grave.
She, whose step was lighter than the roe's, and whose eye was brighter than the eagle's – her dust is consigned to the dust: she is gone to a home from which she shall not return; to a rest which is eternal, to a peace which is unbroken.
She is freed from her sufferings; she is released from her pains.
Why should I mourn for her who is departed? *She* is not consigned to the dust – *she* is not given to the grave!

[1] *Collected Poems.*

She is not a prey to the worms, and her beauty is not departed!
Her soul is ethereal; her spirit is with its God. . . .'

Could Ruskin have expressed himself in verse if he had not had that fatal habit of obedience, and if his father had not so drilled him in the rhythms of Pope and Byron?

But for the vicissitudes of composition, and the visits of a Dr. Andrews who began to supplement Margaret Ruskin's teaching when her son was about eleven, the routine of the Ruskin household rolled on for several years with majestic imperturbability.

Mr. Telford, James Ruskin's partner, the owner of the delightful chariot in which the summer tour was always made, presently intervened by providing the family with a new idea. On John Ruskin's birthday he gave him a momentous present. It was a copy of Rogers' *Italy*, with the Turner vignettes.

> [1] 'I had no sooner cast eyes on the vignettes than I took them for my only masters, and set myself to imitate them as far as I possibly could.'

It is to this gift that Ruskin attributes the choice of the crusade in which he made his name; for it was this copy of Rogers' *Italy* that made the family aware of Turner's work. But it did more than that, for, together with a copy of Prout's *Sketches in Flanders and Germany*, it actually helped to bring about a change in the habits of the Ruskins.

[1] *Præterita*.

CHAPTER V

Circa 1833–1837: Aged 14–18

FIRST TOUR ABROAD, FIRST PROSE, AND A FIRST LOVE AFFAIR

§ 1

MR. TELFORD, as has been said, gave Ruskin a copy of Rogers' *Italy*[1] with the Turner vignettes, and the next year his father brought home from the City a copy of Prout's *Sketches in Flanders and Germany*. Business was going well, and the two books gave a Continental tinge to the picturesque reflections of the Ruskins.

It was Mrs. Ruskin who, in the spring of 1833, suggested the new and extraordinary idea that their next holiday should be taken abroad. The suggestion soon crystallized into a scheme. They would of course travel post, in an English carriage, but for such a journey Mr. Telford's chariot would not do. This tour became, like so many of the family's actions, a prototype, and its pattern runs, with a few well-defined variations, through Ruskin's whole life till fifty years later the charm at last failed to work.

[2] 'The beginning of delight (Ruskin says) was in choosing the carriage, and in arranging cunningly what was to be virtually the travellers' home for many weeks.

[1] It had been out about ten years.
[2] Quoted by E. T. Cook.

> Then came the rapture of starting; the first trot through Camberwell – "the sense of pity for all the inhabitants of Peckham who weren't going, like the pity of lovers on their wedding-day for everybody who is not being married; the change of horses at Dartford, feeling that the last link with Camberwell was broken, that we were already in a new and miraculous world."'

Then came the Channel-crossing in the little paddle-steamer, its sails worn and patched like those of an old fishing-boat. Ruskin was a good sailor and took great delight in loitering and swinging about just over the bowsprit and in watching the plunge of the bows, if there was any swell to lift them. Then came Calais and breakfast, and the horses' heads set straight for Mont Blanc.

The start from Calais was made with four stout French horses, driven by a postilion.

> 'Travellers of birth or consequence,' Ruskin explains, 'had also their *avant-courrier* to gallop in advance, and order the horses at each post-house. My father,' he goes on, 'would have considered it an insolent and revolutionary trespass on the privileges of the nobility to have travelled in such state.'

But the Ruskins liked a good dinner and the best rooms at the best inns. They always started early in the morning, often at six, never later than eight, and travelled slowly, doing not more than fifty miles a day, just as they did on the English tours, and arriving at their destination for dinner at four o'clock. After dinner the boy was allowed two hours of delicious exploring by himself; he had to be in punctually at seven to tea; after which he generally spent his time finishing his sketches till bed-time at half-past nine. The party would in this way spend three or four days

between Calais and Paris, while to travel between Paris and Geneva took a week or more. 'Words,' says one of his chief biographers,[1] 'failed even Ruskin to describe the joy of these enchanted journeys – the afternoon walk among the rocks of Fontainebleau; the wonder of the cathedral aisles of Sens; or the geological rambles on the oolite limestones of Mont Bard.'

But in one way, unfortunately, the extension of the Ruskins' journeys to the Continent made very little difference. In their comfortable carriage, and wrapped in what Frederic Harrison called their *égotisme à trois*, Ruskin and his parents no more partook of the life about them than do the curious who go under the sea in a glass diving-bell. They saw, but they remained in perfect isolation – their hearts and their habits were unchanged and unruffled. The Ruskins must indeed have been among the first of those middle-class English families who, by a leaden transmutation, became tourists instead of travellers. Ruskin himself was destined in his later writings to do a great deal to perpetuate and make easy this new and unfortunate habit.

For we must not forget that when the Ruskins visited Paris, Rome, Pisa, Venice, or Chamonix, they did not travel in the spirit of the eighteenth-century family or young gentleman making the Grand Tour. Such travellers as Gray and Horace Walpole may have done a little sightseeing, but they did not travel primarily to see what was picturesque. They went abroad either to meet the celebrated men of other nations or to study the arts, manufactures, and government of the countries through which they travelled. Walpole paid some attention to Gothic remains, no doubt, and any gentleman might take a mild interest in the ruins of antiquity; but in the main it was for the society of their fellows – writers, wits, statesmen, merchants or manufacturers – that people travelled before the 1830's. After a

[1] E. T. Cook.

few journeys undertaken in such a spirit, an Englishman, a German, or a Frenchman, often became a European. It remained for the shy, middle-class, Evangelical, Scott-nourished, romantic Victorians to invent the sad and desiccated business of being a tourist.

The mode persists. Only in America to-day does the Englishman habitually travel with letters of introduction and an interest in the behaviour of his contemporaries.

The Ruskins were, then, among the first of the tourists. They travelled for scenery, not for society, and were interested only in the pickled or fossilized parts of the life of the countries which they visited.

That even young John Ruskin, leaving a lonely life at Herne Hill, may have felt obscurely that somehow he was missing something as he toured so comfortably, we may perhaps be allowed to suppose. We may assume it from his filling his otherwise blank present so feverishly with the past, and from the fact that his careful studies of the picturesque and mummified aspects of so many foreign towns, have been the consolation of so many tourists who came after him.

But if no human tones could penetrate that glass diving-bell, Ruskin used his eyes and his pen on this and the subsequent tours, with a power which foreshadows the future real magnificence of his prose. Here is a description of the Alpine shepherd's evening prayer. It is taken from his unfinished *Chronicles of St. Bernard*, and, despite its lack of punctuation, shows an unusual power in a boy of sixteen.

> 'I have heard the sacred music of the mass roll and reverberate among the immeasurable twilight of the vast cathedral aisle, and the cadences of the chanted *Te Deum* passing over the heads of thousands bowed at once. I have held my breath when, in the hush of a yet more sacred silence, the secret prayers of the

population of a city rose up in their multitude, till every breath of the incensed air became holy, and the dim light around was full of supplication; but more sublime than the sacred tones that shake the dusky aisles with their tread, more holy than the hush of the bended multitude, were those few voices, whose praise rose up so strangely amid the stillness of the terrible solitude, and passed away and away, till the dead air that sleeps for ever and for ever, voicelessly, like a lifeless spirit upon the lonely mountains, was wakened from its cold silence, and that solitary voice of praise was breathed up into the still blue of heaven rising from the high Alps as from one vast altar to the ear of the Most High, sounding along the vacancy of the illimitable wilderness where God was, and God only.'

His liveliness and dexterity are better shown by a scrap of rhymed dialogue he wrote; it shows some detachment as well as power of characterization. The scene is a Swiss inn where the Ruskin family, including the always practical cousin Mary, are sitting waiting to continue their journey.

'MASTER R. (*looking out of the window*):
The shadows on the mountain flanks
Are grey with morning haziness.

MR. R. (*impatiently*):
What can keep the *char-à-bancs*?
Hang the fellow's laziness!

MISS R. (*speculatively*):
They say it's cold, and wet enough to soak one;
I wonder if I'll need to put my cloak on.

MRS. R. (*peaceably*):
We'll see, my dear, in time; you'd better take it.

MASTER R. (*still looking out of the window*):
With many a range of mountain white
The Valais meets the morn.
The Drance is deep, the Drance is bright;
With thousand foam-globes driving white
Fast and well his billows roll –

SALVADOR (*below the window*):
Sind sie schnell! ja, das geht wohl.'

The poem goes on in the same vein and with continued liveliness.

To record one of these early tours Ruskin planned an ambitious metrical journal in a Byronic manner. But it was never completed, and he gives as his reason for not finishing it that he had 'exhausted on the Jura' all the descriptive terms at his disposal, so that 'none were left for the Alps.'

However, Ruskin, though he lost the knack later, could turn a light kind of Byronic verse very prettily at this time of his life. This picnic scene could hardly be bettered: it teaches us, moreover, that no picture of the Ruskins can be made if we try to lay on the shadows too thick. The picture is not a Salvator Rosa all 'lampblack and lightening,'[1] and the Ruskin solitude was some way from hairshirts and bread and water.

'We'd sixteen miles to go, or thereabout.
That, among hills, is something appetizing.
Hadst seen us, you'd have said, I make no doubt,
Our provend-preparation was surprising!
With lemonade (you cannot get brown stout,
The creamy bubbles through its crystal rising),
Bottles of wine and brandy, butter, bread,
Cheese of the finest – cream and rich Gruyère;
Strawberry jam upon our crusts to spread,
And many a purple plum, and golden pear,

[1] *Modern Painters.*

And polished apples, blushing rosy red;
Ham, beef, and bacon, slices rich and rare; –
We found our knives and dishes useful; you
On carrying them may find them useful too.

Thus from St. Martin's gate we made a start, I
Following in the second *char-à-banc.*
Behind us in a third there came a party
Who, dashing down for Italy point-blank,
Here from their route had ventured to depart; we
Found them agreeable, and free and frank.

. . . . . .

The day was very hot, and quite a smotherer,
That makes one drowsy, which is very odd.
Some of us, who inclined to make a pother were,
Quite disturbed those who were inclined to nod
By playing at bopeep with those in t'other *char* –
Popping behind the leathern curtains broad.
I was ashamed, and told them – "no more gammon! I
Think that a shocking way of going to Chamouni!"

§ 2

In some such manner, from the time he was fifteen till when he was over forty, did Ruskin almost every year travel abroad with his father and mother. Sometimes, as at this first Chamouni picnic, he was gay, but more often he was melancholy, and till he was middle-aged he was always held firm by the invisible cord that bound the three together. Three, not four, for after a few years Cousin Mary's almost silent presence was withdrawn: she was released, she married, she died.

On the first journey, when Ruskin was fourteen, however, the glass bell was not completely closed; they did make one social call, and that was upon Mr. Domecq, James Ruskin's partner. Ruskin has described it in *Præterita*:

'My father's Spanish partner was at that time living in the Champs Élysées, with his English wife and his five daughters; the eldest, Diana, on the eve of her marriage with one of Napoleon's officers, Count Maison; the four others, much younger, chanced to be at home on vacation from their convent school; and we had happy family dinner with them, and Mamma and the girls and a delightful old French gentleman, Mr. Badell, played afterwards at "la toilette de Madame" with me; only I couldn't remember whether I was the necklace or the garters; and then Adèle Clothilde and Cècile played "les Echoes" and other fascinations of dance-melody, – only I couldn't dance; and at last Elise [a little fair girl of nine] had to take pity on me. She, seeing that her elder sisters did not choose to trouble themselves with me, and being herself of an entirely benevolent and pitiful temper, came across the drawing-room to me in my desolation and leaning an elbow on my knee set herself deliberately to chatter to me mellifluously for an hour and a half.'

The chatter was in French, of which the shy red-haired boy understood very little, but he was grateful, and the night ended not unpleasantly.

The time was to come, however, when not even benevolent Elise could cure John Ruskin from the misery of her sister's indifference and mockery.

§ 3

Two years whose working hours were spent as a day-boy at the school of a Mr. Dale seem not to have made much impression upon Ruskin. He says that he consorted very little with his school-fellows. He saw something of a boy who lived next door, but neither seems to have had much pleasure out of it. Mrs. Ruskin, who was always alarmed

if her son was five minutes late for tea, probably did not give John the latitude that is needed for the long, meandering talks, and the sudden visits to borrow a knife, or see a caterpillar, which prelude and accompany boys' friendships. John in particular might have needed a great deal of time, for he was shy and slow, except with his pencil or his pen. But how he would have liked to get away! How much he would have liked to make friends! The need and the desire can be traced all through this period.

Through the stilted but rather charming phrases of a letter to James Hogg, for instance, the then mildly famous 'Ettrick Shepherd,' the reader is aware of a distinct emotional tension: the boy is adventurous, inexperienced and extremely sensitive. The time is 1834, and Hogg, an old friend of his father's, has invited the fifteen-year-old boy to visit him. John Ruskin of course cannot come. 'Hitherto,' he explains in his reluctant letter of refusal, 'I have scarcely left my parents for a day, and I wish to be with them as much as possible.' Yet the visit would have been 'more than I can tell of pleasure,' for he knows that the house is full of children and boys. 'Best not to think of it . . . I do not wish to leave my parents, and they are equally tenacious of me.'

Instead of making friends the boy, by 1835–6, was soon beginning to write regularly. He produced not only verse for *Friendship's Offering*, but prose for Louden's *Architectural Magazine*, and later for *Blackwood's* and *The Times*. He wrote well, and in the dictatorial style into which most young writers fall, whether they feel didactic or not. He differed, however, in one important respect from most young writers. About matters of fact he never generalized until he had a more than respectable fund of knowledge and observation behind him.

If he said, in his long essay on picturesque architecture, that in Cumberland the cottage chimneys were built in

such a way, in Normandy in another way, and in Italy in yet a third, the statements would be made from his own observation, and not of one, but of a dozen honestly chosen examples.

The articles which he wrote in considerable quantities when he was under sixteen are in fact excellent special journalism, fresh, original, and painstaking.

Such an early success had, as can be supposed, a distinct effect on Ruskin's character. He might have had the strength of mind to discount his father and mother's extraordinary opinion of his powers; but when Mr. Pringle, Mr. Harrison, Mr. Louden, and other editors of fashionable publications, were ready to print and praise the work of a schoolboy, it is difficult to blame Ruskin for being convinced that he was an unusual person. Besides, it was true; and his only hope of remaining in a salutary state of error about his powers, would have lain in his consorting with other boys of his own calibre. They would have been difficult to find, for James and Margaret's son had genius.

One great disadvantage of his isolation was that he was shown no alternative methods of self-assertion. Under the circumstances we cannot blame John Ruskin if in his innocence he supposed that in the romantic, reflective, argumentative manner of these publications lay his only possible means of self-expression. Like many women, he was forced by his sheltered and solitary life to express himself in writing. The belief that if you wanted to express yourself you looked up a lot of facts and then sat down alone with your pen, was one that Ruskin never entirely shook off, and the immediate results of so unsocial and solemn a method were disastrous.

§ 4

In 1836, when he was seventeen, happened the first great event in John Ruskin's long sentimental history. This his-

tory indeed may be said to have begun in form when Mr. Domecq came with four of his daughters on a visit to Herne Hill.

> [1] 'How we got them all into Herne Hill corners and cupboards would be inexplicable but with a plan of the three stories! The arrangements were half Noah's ark, half doll's house, but we got them all in: Adèle-Clotilde, a graceful oval-faced blonde of fifteen; Cècile, a dark, finely-browed, beautifully featured girl of thirteen; Elise, again, fair, round-faced like an English girl, a treasure of good nature and good sense; Caroline, a delicately quaint little thing of eleven. They had all been born abroad, Adèle-Clotilde at Cadiz, and of course convent-bred; but lately accustomed to be much in society during vacation at Paris. Deeper than any one dreamed, the sight of them in the Champs Élysées had sealed itself in me, for they were the first well-bred and well-dressed girls I had ever seen – or at least spoken to. . . . These girls were a most curious galaxy or southern cross of unconceived stars, floating on a sudden into my obscure firmament of London suburb.'

Mrs. Ruskin scarcely considered anything beyond the practical difficulties of getting them in. John, thank Heaven, had been taught the truth from his babyhood, whereas these girls were convent-bred and Catholics. John, she was convinced, was safe enough, and she turned her mind to her own spiritual exercises and to the ordering of even better dinners than usual.

She could not have been worse beguiled or lulled by the snares of the flesh or the Devil. It took four days to reduce her son to ashes, while the subsequent *mércredi des cêndres* lasted, as he says himself, for four years. Love overwhelmed

[1] *Præterita.*

and astonished him, and he was delivered over bound and helpless to this elegant self-sufficient young Parisian. His own words – written in the calm of later sorrows – portray the full humour and misery of his situation.

> [1] 'How many parents (he writes) could allow their young novice to be cast into the fiery furnace of the outer world in this helpless manner the reader may wonder, and only the Fates know; but there was this excuse for them, that they had never seen me the least interested or anxious about girls – never caring to stay in the promenades at Cheltenham or Bath, or on the parade at Dover; on the contrary, growling and mewing if I was ever kept there, and off to the sea or the fields the moment I got leave; and they had educated me in such extremely orthodox English Toryism and Evangelicalism that they could not conceive their scientific, religious, and George-the-Third-revering youth wavering in his constitutional balance towards French Catholics. And I had never *said* anything about the Champs Élysées! Virtually convent-bred more closely than the maids themselves, without a single sisterly or cousinly affection for refuge or lightning rod, and having no athletic skill or pleasure to check my dreaming, I was thrown, bound hand and foot, in my unaccomplished simplicity, into the fiery furnace, or fiery cross, of these four girls – who of course reduced me to a mere heap of white ashes in four days.
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> . . . . . .
>
> Clotilde (Adèle-Clotilde in full, but her sisters called her Clotilde. . . . I Adèle, because it rhymed to shell, spell, and knell) was only made more resplendent by the circlet of her sisters' beauty; while my own shyness and unpresentableness were further stiffened, or rather

[1] *Præterita.*

sanded, by a patriotic and Protestant conceit, which was tempered neither by politeness nor sympathy; so that, while in company, I sate jealously miserable like a stock fish . . . on any blessed occasion of *tête-à-tête* I endeavoured to entertain my Spanish-born, Paris-bred, and Catholic-hearted mistress with my own views upon the subjects of the Spanish Armada, the Battle of Waterloo, and the doctrine of Transubstantiation.'

Even in the state of blushing, stiffness and boasting to which love had reduced him, it became at last apparent to the boy that these conversations were not being a great success. He had recourse, therefore, to his usual medium, and shutting himself up, sent off in due course to *Friendship's Offering* the excessively bad but fashionable story of the 'Bandit Leoni.'

Unfortunately, however, Adèle-Clotilde had not, like a fashionable English Miss of the period, been nurtured on tales such as *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Castle of Otranto*. But these were almost necessary preludes, without which the pearls, dungeons, lonely towers, owls, daggers, and robber bands, of Ruskin's story, seemed merely funny. The result was that under this new form of courtship she merely became derisive. Poor John, thus snubbed, became shyer and shyer. When at last the 'southern cross' moved off to Paris again, he had realized that this time the peacock's tail of his dazzling prose had been displayed in vain; Mr. Pringle, Mr. Louden, his parents, might admire, but what was the good of that? Ruskin tells the story admirably:

[1] 'When she went back to Paris I wrote her a French letter seven quarto pages long, descriptive of the desolations and solitudes of Herne Hill since her departure. This letter, either Elise or Caroline wrote to tell me, she had really read, and "laughed immensely

[1] *Præterita.*

at the French of." Both Caroline and Elise pitied me a little, and did not like to say she had also laughed at the contents. . . . The old people, meanwhile, saw little harm in all this. Mr. Domecq, who was extremely good-natured, and a good judge of character, rather liked me, because he saw that I was good-natured also, and had some seedling brains, which would come up in time: in the interests of the business he was perfectly ready to give me any of his daughters I liked, who could also be got to like me, but considered that the time was not come to talk of such things. My father was entirely of the same mind, besides being pleased at my getting a story printed in *Friendship's Offering*, glad that I saw something of girls with good manners, and in hopes that if I wrote poetry about them it might be as good as the *Hours of Idleness*. My mother, who looked upon the idea of my marrying a Roman Catholic as too monstrous to be possible in the decrees of Heaven, and too preposterous to be even guarded against on earth, was rather annoyed at the whole business, as she would have been if one of her chimneys had begun smoking – but had not the slightest notion her house was on fire.'

The poor hero of the affair was bitterly hurt and bewildered, and felt, moreover, to his deep chagrin that he had cut a foolish figure. We shall be able – perhaps with the help of memory – to conceive his misery if we bear in mind that humiliation was a sensation for which none of his previous experience had prepared him. He had not been allowed, like other children, to get used to ignominy at an earlier, tougher age. He felt ashamed and wretched, and yet he was so unused to any sort of conflict that he did not recognize the symptoms of defeat, and refused to accept the facts.

[1] 'I was yet (he says) not a whit dashed back out of my daily swelling foam of conceit, supported as it was by real depth of feeling, and by a true and glorious sense of the newly-revealed miracle of human love, in its exaltation of the physical beauty of the world I had till then sought by its own light alone.'

The immediate outcome of all this fine feeling was the writing of a quite touchingly bad fragment of a *Venetian Tragedy*. Its reader will believe Ruskin when, in a later commentary, he says that he sat down to write it 'in a state of majestic imbecility.'

[1] *Præterita.*

CHAPTER VI

Circa 1837–1840: Aged 18–21

THE GENTLEMAN COMMONER: AND THE LOSS OF ADÈLE

§ 1

In the meantime, in the serener dimensions of his parents' plans and intentions, the time had come for John Ruskin to go up to Oxford. His father had arranged it all, going up there himself to see the authorities.

The Oxford of 1837 had scarcely felt the coming of the new age, except in the matter of theological controversy. And even here she did not feel it so very directly, for while the outer world was full of Cobden and Bright, and of Quakerism and Evangelicalism, Oxford was beginning to be High Church. Class distinctions were carefully kept up. In Oxford, as in the House of Commons of the day, the distinction between well-to-do middle-class people and real gentry still existed. Undergraduates at Oxford were still divided into classes which were distinguished from one another by the wearing of silk or cotton gowns, gilt or black tassels on their caps, and by the glory and comfort of their seats at table and lodgings. For so precious a creature as his son John, James Ruskin decided that the silk robe and gold tassel of a gentleman commoner would be the thing, and Ruskin must have been one of the first middle-class boys to wear them.

Thus when (in the year of Queen Victoria's Accession) he went up to Christchurch, Ruskin found himself among a most inappropriate set of young men. We hear of Francis Charteris, who afterwards became Lord Wemyss, Lord Desart, Lord Emlyn, Lord Kildare, Sir Matthew Tierney, later of the Guards, and Robert Grimston, who was interested in cricket, boxing, and steeplechasing.

Ruskin was a wine-merchant's son, home-bred and green, with no public school behind him. Strangely enough, however, he appears to have got on quite well with the blades and the bloods, and had nothing but pleasant memories of his time there. They were young men who seem to the modern reader to have had no less distinctly the flavour of the old reigns of George and William than Ruskin had of what was to come with Victoria and her Albert. 'I was received,' he says, 'as a good-humoured, inoffensive little cur, contemptuously yet kindly, among the dogs of race at the gentlemen commoners' table.' He made some blunders by taking college rules too literally, but his sherry was excellent, and he could take a joke. Henry Acland, who later became a distinguished physiologist and Ruskin's lifelong friend, saw Ruskin for the first time when he was being ridden round Tom Quad by one of the bloods into whose company his father had thrown him. Ruskin seems neither to have liked nor disliked this exercise, and it seems scarcely to have impressed him. On another evening, his biographer Cook tells how a cheerful party invaded Ruskin's rooms, broke through his door and rushed into his bedroom.

> 'Ruskin received them in his dressing-gown. "Gentlemen," he said, with a sweet smile, "I am sorry I cannot now entertain you as I should wish; but my father, who is engaged in the sherry trade, has put it into my power to invite you all to wine to-morrow evening. Will you come?" '

The rioters are said to have withdrawn with 'Three cheers for Ruskin!'

Bob Grimston, the boxer and racing man, seems to have had a sort of tolerance for him.

> 'Grimston (says Ruskin) condescended to take me with him one day to a tavern across Magdalen Bridge to hear him elucidate from the landlord some points of the horses entered for the Derby – an object only to be accomplished by sitting with indifference on a corner of the kitchen table, and carrying on a dialogue with careful pauses, and more by winks than words.'

As a description of a horsy conversation Ruskin's phrase could be perhaps elaborated, but it could not be bettered.

Grimston no doubt wore the tightly-strapped check trousers, several layers of waistcoat, tremendous cravat, and carried the knowing little cane, proper to a sporting character. But Ruskin's clothes were quieter, and had a touch of deliberate picturesqueness. His ordinary dress at Oxford was a pair of trousers strapped under the instep, a brown frock-coat with an ample velvet collar, and a blue neck-cloth. This was a dress well calculated to show off his tall slim figure, his brilliant blue eyes and tawny hair.

Ruskin writes to his father about some of the racing that went on against rules, and of the exciting return in gigs.

> 'I should have liked to have seen Desart in his jockey cap and jacket. There was very high betting – one man lost £1,500. All the Dons of the University were assembled at the Dean's house – the result of their lucubrations is unknown, but the riders are afraid of Collections. When they were returning, the proctors, particularly Hussey, were excessively active endeavour-

ing to catch them, dashing at the horses' heads and endeavouring to seize the bridles; but they whipped their horses by at full speed; one fellow knocked off Hussey's cap and drove neatly over it. He only succeeded in catching two men in a gig, whose horse was tired and could not be got into speed.'

Ruskin, as has been told, sometimes gave impromptu wines, but he was also often the host at chess parties.

'I gave a chess party last night,' he writes to his father . . . 'and played Goring. . . . Our game lasted an hour and a half. . . . Carew came in, and then Tierney. Liddell appeared too. . . . Liddell was soliloquizing to this effect upon the figure he should cut at collections: "I've had three lectures a week from Mr. Brown, and have attended five in the term; I've had ditto from Mr. Kynaston, and have attended two in the term; and three a week from Mr. Hill, and I've attended three; and I'll be dashed if I don't come off as well as the whole set of you." '

§ 2

One surprising fact about Ruskin's stay at Oxford remains to be told. Incredible as it may seem, his mother took lodgings in Oxford, and lived there during the whole of every term as long as her son was up; while James Ruskin came and joined her at every week-end. John was required to go and take tea with them at seven or eight o'clock every evening. They would seldom appear in public with him; but the fact that they were up was quite well known. Ruskin, who was always fond of analysing his activities, gives an account of his day's routine which is perhaps worth quoting, for it shows the vast amount of dutifulness and exactitude which he carried everywhere with him.

[1] 'I never missed chapel; and in winter got an hour's reading before it. Breakfast at nine – half an hour allowed for it to a second, for Captain Marryat with my roll and butter. College lectures till one. Lunch, with a little talk to anybody who cared to come in, or share their own commons with me. At two, Buckland or other professor's lecture. Walk till five, hall dinner, wine either given or accepted, and quiet chat over it with the reading men, or a frolic with those of my own table; but I always got round to the High Street to my mother's tea at seven, and amused myself till Tom rang in, and I got with a run to Canterbury gate, and settled to a steady bit of final reading till ten. I can't make out more than six hours' real work in the day, but that was constantly and unflinchingly given.'

But the parental policy of daily contacts with his mother and a full time-table – a policy which we see clearly but innocently set out here – was not merely intended to guard Ruskin's health or to preserve him from debauchery; for of debauchery his father and mother seem to have realized there was very little danger. But a worse peril lurked in quad and cloister. The Tractarian Movement was flourishing, and there was a great deal in the Oxford High Church doctrine which might have been expected to interest and attract him.

Mrs. Ruskin studied the Tractarian Movement, and grew, as a result, both alarmed and bewildered. She had, we are to remember, swallowed the Evangelicalism of the Croydon day-school whole, and rejected the cynicism of Edinburgh entirely. Now, therefore, when the new Christian doctrines of the High Church party came to her ears, she had little critical apparatus with which to examine them. They smelt strange, that was all she could say.

[1] *Præterita.*

> 'What are the real doctrines of Puseyism? (she wrote to Ruskin). Why do they not state them fairly and in such plain terms as may enable people of ordinary understandings to know what they do think the truth? Any time I have heard Mr. Newman preach, he seemed to me like Oliver Cromwell to talk that he might not be understood. . . . Surely our Saviour's consecration must have effected a change in the Elements if an ordinary minister can; but these are things too much for me. I thank God I have His word to go to; and I beseech you to take nothing for granted that you hear from these people, but think and search for yourself. As I have said, I have little fear of you, but I shall be glad when you get from among them.'

But like all other Oxford influences, Puseyism seems to have had no effect on Ruskin. His account of Dr. Pusey in *Præterita* is nothing if not detached.

> 'Dr. Pusey was not in the least a picturesque or tremendous figure, but only a sickly and rather ill-put-together English clerical gentleman, who never looked one in the face, or appeared aware of the state of the weather.'

The daily teas with his mother did their work and isolated him from the world of Oxford. He seems indeed to have had a trivial view of most of his Oxford associates. They were to him merely beings who moved in that clear unencountered world that waved and swayed outside the diving-bell.

> 'I am amused (he goes on), as I look back, in now perceiving what an æsthetic view I had of all my tutors and companions – how consistently they took to me the aspect of pictures, and how I from the first declined

giving any attention to those which were not well painted enough. My ideal of a tutor was founded on what Holbein or Dürer had represented in Erasmus or Melanchthon, or, even more solemnly, on Titian's Magnificoes or Bonifazio's Bishops.'

There was, of course, some excuse for this attitude. Dr. Buckland, for instance, with whom he studied geology, seems really to have been a man who could be legitimately looked at as an oddity rather than as a person.

[1] 'Dr. Buckland used to say that he had eaten his way straight through the animal creation, and that the worst thing was a mole; though indeed perhaps there was one thing even worse than a mole, and that was a blue-bottle fly. . . . Ruskin always regretted a day of unlucky engagement on which he missed a delicate toast of mice; and remembered, with delight, being waited upon one hot summer morning by two graceful and polite little Carolina lizards, who kept off the flies.'

It was at Buckland's house that Ruskin first met Darwin; and the two men got together and talked all the evening.

There is something touching in one final precaution which James Ruskin took for his son's pleasure and social success. During the vacations he hired a room for him in St. James's Street, in order that his smart friends might not have the trouble of going out to Herne Hill. His artistic friends were taken there, however, for James Ruskin had already begun a notable collection of pictures. Ruskin tells a story in *The Arts and Pleasures of England à propos* of this, of how he took a fellow-student out to Herne Hill to see a Copley Fielding which delighted him. The young man, 'who had been urged far, by the thirst for oriental travel,' gazed blankly for some moments at this grey picture of two High-

[1] E. T. Cook's *Life*.

land drovers in the rain. Presently, turning to his host, he said, 'But, Ruskin, what is the use of painting such dreadfully bad weather?'

§ 3

On the whole, then, Ruskin benefited very little by Oxford, whose influence after all depends a good deal upon getting young men away from their homes. Ruskin, as we have heard, brought his home with him. Some of his biographers suggest that another reason for his impenetrability is to be found in the fact that he was still so very much in love with Adèle: the affair being warmed up again by the Domecq girls coming to Herne Hill for the Christmas holidays in 1838. There is no question that, if we read the poems which he wrote at this time, we must conclude that he thought a great deal about Adèle and was very unhappy on her account. The poems are bad; but suffering has never yet acted as a kind of coupon upon fate in return for which inspiration arrives by return of post. Besides, Ruskin took advice about his poetry, and everybody advised him to write like Pope; in fact, if he wanted to win the Newdigate (a success upon which his father had set his heart) it was essential that he should look back at least as far as Byron. There was no one to remind him of the Lament for Cousin Jessie or to tell him to read Blake.

But in poetry Ruskin never shook himself free of the grand manner. There seems to have been no one to tell him that styles which suited two such worldlings as Pope and Byron, were not at all likely to be the right form of expression for Ruskin at twenty, with his inexperience and his astonishing power of using his eyes. Three years later he was to quote long passages from *The Excursion* in *Modern Painters*; but Wordsworth's lyrics do not seem to have affected him.

Most of his biographers complain of a 'strain of morbidity' in the work of his undergraduate period.

For the subject of one of the poems which he wrote at Oxford, for instance, he takes this story from Herodotus, setting it out in prose as a preface to his poem.

> [1] 'When the master of a Scythian family died, he was placed in his state chariot, and carried to visit every one of his blood-relations. Each of them gave him and his attendants a splendid feast, at which the dead man sat at the head of the table, and a piece of everything was put on his plate. In the morning he continued his circuit. This round of visits generally occupied nearly forty days, and he was never buried till the whole number had elapsed. I have taken him at about six days old, when a little phosphoric light might play about his skin in the dark, and yet the corruption would not, in a cool country, have made anything shapeless or decidedly unpleasant.'

Nor was *The Scythian Guest* the only instance, and his father complained of the 'slaughter-house atmosphere' of some of his work. His biographer, Mr. Collingwood, too, is slightly shocked by *Salsette and Elephanta*, the third of Ruskin's Newdigate poems, and the one which won the prize. *Salsette and Elephanta* has in fact the regulation Newdigate qualities of prim pretentiousness, and yet for all that there is no doubt that in turning it over or in reading any of the other poems that Ruskin wrote after he met Adèle, the reader is left with a feeling not merely of pity for their author but of perturbation. A sense of hollowness, an impression of disappointment runs through them that is tragic when we remember the youth and the real brilliance of the writer.

But up to the time we have reached the unhappiness is

[1] *Collected Poems.*

only an under-current. If Ruskin had not enough spirit to break his chains, he had yet too much not generally to seem and quite often to be perfectly happy. There is no doubt, for instance, that he very much enjoyed the honours brought him by winning the Newdigate. Here, for instance, is a letter that he wrote to his father on June 12, 1839:

> 'I am in a great hurry, going to Athlone's, but I thought the Censor's speech particularly eloquent last night, and my mother can't remember the substance thereof. After a few remarks on the Class List, he began to speak of a certain *insignis juvenis – ex superiori ordine* – of the upper rank of his college – uniting an intense degree of intellect and morality, who having acquired extensive knowledge of men and manners and natural phenomena during protracted travel . . . etc., had been successful . . . etc., to the great joy of his tutors. . . . Then he proceeded to compare this Juvenis to Alexander the Great and Pompey, though I couldn't catch the points of resemblance, and wound up by returning thanks to him in the name of his college, and saying they expected higher honour from him yet. All this in Latin, and a great deal more which I could not hear. I want a brown, rough, bright-eyed brute of a new dog.'

But there were yet greater honours to come. The recitation of the prize poem in the Sheldonian Theatre was a great event. On the same occasion other people observed that William Wordsworth received an honorary degree. But Ruskin's parents seem to have taken the day's triumph as entirely glorifying their son. 'There were 2,000 ladies and gentlemen to hear the recitation,' records Ruskin's father. 'He was not at all nervous, and it all went off very well, and the notice taken of him is quite extraordinary.' Ruskin's biographers, however, have faint misgivings; but Wordsworth's biographer, Knight, had none at all.

> 'The outburst of enthusiasm (writes Knight) which greeted Wordsworth in the Sheldonian Theatre that day has been referred to by many as almost unexampled. He received in the theatre an enthusiastic welcome, a cordial, reverent homage which I at least have never seen equalled, and an honour the highest which the University can bestow. . . .'

Knight was himself present, and heard and swelled the cheering.

> 'The thundering applause, from all quarters, when the name of Wordsworth was heard, and his venerable form was seen advancing in the procession, I cannot at all describe. It was really delightful to see such a tribute to such a man. It was the public voice for once harmoniously joining to pay homage to goodness, and to talent, consistently employed in promoting the real happiness of his fellow-creatures.'

Ruskin and Wordsworth met at a party afterwards, and Wordsworth is said to have taken kindly notice of the prizeman.

Later Ruskin looked back with irritation upon this whole long and dignified affair. His father's joy, he says, was tearful, and Ruskin himself was 'ineffably conceited and puffed up.'

> [1] 'We went (he says) on our summer travels that year to Cornwall, where I expected the miners to regard me with admiration as the winner of the Newdigate. . . . I cannot understand how schoolmasters of sense allow their boys even to try for prizes.'

His father, James Ruskin, celebrated the event in the usual way. Whenever anything pleasant happened, or when

[1] E. T. Cook's *Life*.

Ruskin wrote a magazine article of which he particularly approved, James Ruskin had begun the excellent habit of buying a Turner water-colour. But of this habit, and the consolatory use to which it was put, we shall hear more in the course of the next chapter.

§ 4

Adèle-Clotilde was, as John Ruskin knew, still unkind, and yet she might perhaps even now be won, along with the approval of the world, by a young man who had done so brilliantly as to win the Newdigate – a young man who was, if not to be a bishop, at any rate now certain to be very much of a personage? But a blow was preparing. All the time, while such thoughts were going round in the prize-man's head, negotiations were going on in Paris for Adèle's marriage to a French count.

They tried to keep the business from Ruskin: yet with the inertia and the ostrich-like fatuity which comes over us all sometimes when events move without our volition along worn grooves, his parents let the Domecq girls come to spend Christmas with them. They had come the year before, and had thus spent three fairly long periods at Herne Hill.

It is not known whether on this visit (1839) poor Ruskin found out what was going to happen, or whether, if Adèle told him, he could bring himself to believe such a misfortune to be possible. Things are often too bad to seem possible at twenty. At any rate, whatever he found out or believed, this last Christmas visit was under the circumstances an extraordinary piece of callousness. For Ruskin had really begun to recover a little: and might, as he says himself, very easily have settled to work and forgetfulness in spite of all the glamour of the Newdigate.

Actually, in the previous spring, Ruskin had been on the edge of forgetting Adèle and of falling in love again.

He had been attracted by the daughter of an old neighbour. Her father, Mr. Withers, was a coal merchant who had gone bankrupt and left the neighbourhood. But the spring, it seems, had power to stir even Mr. Withers, and how much more Ruskin?

> [1] 'Mr. Withers came up to town (writes Ruskin) on some vestige of carboniferous business, bringing his only daughter with him to show my mother, who, for a wonder, asked her to stay with us, while her father visited his umquwhile clientage at the coal-wharves. Charlotte Withers was a fragile, fair, freckled, sensitive slip of a girl about sixteen; graceful in an unfinished and small wild-flower sort of a way, extremely intelligent, affectionate, wholly right-minded, and mild in piety. An altogether sweet and delicate creature of ordinary sort, not pretty, but quite pleasant to see, especially if her eyes were looking your way, and her mind with them.
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> 'We got to like each other in a mildly confidential way in the course of a week. We disputed on the relative dignities of music and painting; and I wrote an essay nine foolscap pages long, proposing the entire establishment of my own opinions, and the total discomfiture and overthrow of hers, according to my usual manner of paying court to my mistresses. Charlotte Withers, however, thought I did her great honour, and carried away the essay as if it had been a school prize.
>
> 'And, as I said, if my father and mother had chosen to keep her a month longer, we should have fallen quite melodiously and quietly in love; and they might have given me an excellently pleasant little wife, and set me up, geology and all, in the coal business, without any resistance or further trouble on my part. I don't

[1] *Præterita.*

> suppose the idea ever occurred to them; Charlotte was not the kind of person they proposed for me. So Charlotte went away at the week's end, when her father was ready for her. I walked with her to Camberwell Green, and we said good-bye, rather sorrowfully, at the corner of the New Road; and that possibility of meek happiness vanished for ever. A little while afterwards, her father "negotiated" a marriage for her with a well-to-do Newcastle trader, whom she took because she was bid. He treated her pretty much as one of his coal sacks, and in a year or two she died.'

But Adèle and the 'Southern Cross,' who were at a convent school in England, came, as has been said, and spent Christmas, so it was not likely that poor Charlotte's little candle would have a chance to draw Ruskin away to safety.

> 'I don't know (Ruskin goes on) what would have happened if Adèle had been a perfectly beautiful and amiable girl, and had herself in the least liked me. I suppose then my mother would have been overcome.'

A curious passage follows. The art critic of sixty-six, Adèle's lover, and the philosopher seem to write in quick alternation.

> 'But though extremely lovely at fifteen (Ruskin goes on) Adèle was not prettier than French girls in general at eighteen; she was firm, and fiery, and high-principled, but not in the least amiable; and although she would have married me, had her father wished it, was always glad to have me out of her way. My love was much too high and fantastic to be diminished by her loss of beauty; but I perfectly well saw and admitted it, having never at any time been in the slightest degree blinded by love, as I perceive other

> men are, out of my critic nature. And day followed on day, and month to month, of complex absurdity, pain, error, wasted affection, and rewardless semi-virtue.'

It is curious to speculate on how much Adèle, and how much Ruskin, knew or believed about the marriage during those three or four weeks of the second Christmas holiday. But even if she told him all about it, in her short, contemptuous way, a thing so unwanted, so impossibly dreadful, may well, as has been suggested, have floated unabsorbed somewhere in the dream-world of Young Lochinvars, and Bandit Leonis, Indian caves, and Final Schools, and all the rest of the hodge-podge which harboured in Ruskin's head. He surely need not, he may have felt, believe anything so disastrous while it remained unconfirmed by his elders?

§ 5

With this loss hanging over him, Ruskin struggled to qualify himself for the brilliant degree upon which his father counted. It was during the long vacation of 1839 that a charming, but unfortunately transitory figure moved across the stage of Ruskin's life. It was that of a young don named Osborne Gordon, who came to read with him and to help him to the degree. Gordon deserves to be immortal for his golden inaugural sentence to his new pupil. 'When you have got too much to do,' Gordon told him, 'don't do it.'

> 'Very early (says Ruskin) a keen, though entirely benevolent, sense of the absurdity of the world took away Gordon's heart in working for it: perhaps I should rather have said, the density and unmalleability of the world, than absurdity. He thought there was nothing to be done with it, and that after all it would get on by itself.'

Osborne Gordon, then, was there when at last Ruskin realized that he had truly lost Adèle. In September, 1839, after four years of hope and effort and unwilling fidelity (had he not tried to fall in love with Miss Withers?), he realized that Adèle was not for him. She refused him definitely, and he was told about the marriage to Baron Duquesne, who was a rich and handsome 'sportsman.'

What was the good to Ruskin of Gordon's advice now, how could he emulate somebody with a sense of the absurdity of the world, when he had lost Adèle? In his poem *Farewell*, he imagines a last meeting, tenderer than their real parting.

[1] 'Yet come – and let thy glance be dim,
And let thy words be low;
Then turn – for ever turn – from him
Whose love thou canst not know; –
And reck not of the faithful breast,
Whose thoughts have now no home – nor rest –
That wreathed, with unregarded light,
Thy steps by day, and sleep by night.
Then when the wildest word is past,
And when mine eyes have looked their last,
Be every barrier earth can twine
Cast in between my soul and thine –
The wave, the wild, the steel, the flame,
And all that word or will can frame:
When God shall call or man shall claim,
Depart from me, and let thy name
Be uttered in mine ears with dread,
As only meaning – what is dead –
Like some lost sound of long ago,
That grief is learning not to know;

[1] *Collected Poems.*

And I will walk the world as one
Who hath but little left to feel;
And smile to see affection shun
The moveless brow and heart of steel;
Thou in thy pride alone shalt know
What left them lifeless years ago;
Thou mayst recall the pang, the hour,
That gave my soul that pain of power;
And deem that darkened spirit free –
Ay! even from the love of thee.'

During the winter the negotiations for the marriage in Paris went on, and in March, 1840, Adèle Clotilde was married.

CHAPTER VII

1840–1841: Aged 21–22

TURNER AND AN EXCURSION

'From clime to clime they hurry me to banish my regret,
And if they win a smile from me; they think that I forget.'
Drawing-room ballad

§ 1

THE world, even the Denmark Hill world, did not come to an end because John Ruskin had lost Adèle. Things went on much as usual, and Ruskin went on playing his part for some months. He went back to Oxford for the Lent Term . . . he came of age.

This being the story of an actual human being, it goes on to chronicle not only the fact that losing Adèle nearly killed Ruskin, but, in the same stretch of time, events that had a great deal of pleasure in them. The facts are too characteristic of real events to be blurred by a 'dramatic' chronology. Ruskin had begun to admire Turner; and, as has been said, a new habit had grown up in the family of expressing satisfaction by buying a Turner water-colour to add to the growing collection. There was *Richmond Bridge* and *Gosport*; and now, when his son came of age, James Ruskin gave him *Winchelsea*, besides settling on him an allowance of £200 a year.

The first thing Ruskin did with his money was to buy another Turner, this time of *Harlech Castle*. But unfortunately he shocked and hurt his father by the way in which he did it. The circumstances are elaborate, but they are worth recalling.

It happened that James Ruskin disliked Turner's business agent. Griffith was a man who brought out all James Ruskin's cautious contradictiousness: he was always afraid of being taken in by him, and so, as John Ruskin saw, his father often let the best drawings pass, 'because Mr. Griffith recommended them,' while *Winchelsea* and *Gosport* were both bought – among other reasons – 'because Mr. Griffith said they were not drawings which we ought to have'!

About *Harlech* there had been a good deal of public discussion. It was not clear whether it was really for sale, for it must be remembered that in 1839 Turner was both rich and famous, and very often kept back favourite pictures, or put a price on them which he hoped would be prohibitive. At the private view of the Old Water Colour Society, people shook their heads and hinted that he was putting an absurd price upon *Harlech*. This was the situation when the Ruskins took their place among the saunterers in the gallery. Ruskin brings the scene before us:

> 'Arm in arm with my father, I met Mr. Griffith in the crowd. After the proper five minutes of how we liked the exhibition, he turned specially to me. "I have some good news for you, the *Harlech* is really for sale." "I'll take it then,' I replied, without so much as a glance at my father, and without asking the price. Smiling a little ironically, Mr. Griffith went on, "And seventy" – implying that seventy was a low price. . . . But it was thirty above the *Winchelsea*, twenty-four above *Gosport*, and my father was of course sure that Mr. Griffith had put twenty pounds on at the instant. The mingled grief and scorn on his face told me what I had done; but I was too happy in pouncing on my *Harlech* to feel for him.'

It was a small matter, but it apparently took the father and son several years to get over the bitter feeling that

began here, and grew and spread, the symptom or symbol no doubt of some deeper, unconscious hurt, but always treated by them as a real source of disagreement. Writing in his old age Ruskin took it most seriously and called it fatal, as well as foolish. Curiously enough, however, he does himself link the idea with his disappointment in love, by going on rather charmingly to wonder, as he looks back at his undoubted eagerness and delight at getting the *Harlech* at such a time. For side by side with this vivid pleasure, he sees written in the 'foolish diaries' he began to write at this time, so much about 'a general disdain of life . . . which seems inconsistent with extreme satisfaction in getting a water-colour drawing, sixteen inches by nine.'

Part of this unhappiness seems to have had, however, a simple cause. We shall have sometimes, later on, to call in question 'overwork' as an explanation of everything that went wrong with Ruskin. But this time the simple, obvious explanation seems legitimate. In spite of Gordon, Ruskin as soon as he got back to Oxford began working at high pressure, from six in the morning till twelve at night, and it was not long before the blow fell. He lived, he says, a life of steady grind with little exercise, no cheerfulness, and a haunting ever-present sense of what was going on in Paris.

> [1] 'One evening, after Gordon had left me, about ten o'clock, a short tickling cough surprised me, because preceded by a curious sensation in the throat, and followed by a curious taste in the mouth, which I presently perceived to be that of blood. It must have been on a Saturday or Sunday evening, for my father, as well as my mother, was in the High Street lodgings. I walked round to them and told them what had happened.'

That was the end of Ruskin's Oxford career.

[1] *Præterita.*

§ 2

Mrs. Ruskin was not so much upset as might have been supposed. For here after all was her oddity in taking lodgings in Oxford triumphantly justified! With very little fuss or delay the whole family moved off to London, and for a month or two lived quietly and anxiously at Herne Hill – Ruskin in enforced idleness.

It was in this vacuum of time that Ruskin got to know Turner, whom he had before only met for a moment. His diary records the meeting with ecstasy.

> 'Introduced to-day to the man who beyond all doubt is the greatest of the age; greatest in every faculty of the imagination, in every branch of scenic knowledge; at once *the* painter and poet of the day, J. M. W. Turner. Everybody had described him to me as coarse, boorish, unintellectual, vulgar. This I knew to be impossible. I found in him a somewhat eccentric, keen-mannered, matter-of-fact, English-minded gentleman: good-natured evidently, bad-tempered evidently, hating humbug of all sorts, shrewd, perhaps a little selfish, highly intellectual, the powers of the mind not brought out with any delight in their manifestation, or intention of display, but flashing out occasionally in a word or a look.'

Commenting afterwards upon this entry, Ruskin is pleased.

> 'Pretty close, that, and full, to be seen at a first glimpse, and set down the same evening. Curiously, the drawing of Kenilworth was one of those that came out of Mr. Griffith's folio after dinner; and I believe I must have talked some folly about it, as beng "a leading one of the *England* series": which would displease Turner greatly. There were few things he hated more than

hearing people gush about particular drawings. He knew it merely meant they could not see the others. 'Anyhow, he stood silent; the general talk went on as if he had not been there. He wished me good night kindly, and I did not see him again till I came back from Rome.'

It is a pity that Turner has left us no picture of Ruskin, for he must have thought him a queer sort of young man, and a great chatterbox. Ruskin was not altogether unknown to him, for he had already, when he was seventeen, acted as Turner's apologist and had written a 'vindication' of Turner's picture, *Juliet and her Nurse*, which had been violently attacked by the critics. The idea had been that Ruskin's defence should be sent for publication to *Blackwood's*, and the manuscript was sent to Turner for his sanction. But he, after seeing the piece, said that he preferred that it should merely be sent to the picture's purchaser. This was done. This is the first indication we have of the relations of the two men – adulatory and chivalrous on the one hand, and slightly but not wholly repressive on the other.

§ 3

Popular tradition holds that Ruskin was in some sense the 'discoverer' of Turner, and indeed Ruskin himself, in an epilogue to *Modern Painters*, has given some justification for this legend. For in giving a list of painters whose 'excellence and supremacy' were despised until he spoke for them, he includes Turner in the catalogue along with such painters as Tintoretto, Fra Angelico, and Botticelli – painters for whose 'revival' in England he should apparently have the chief, though not sole credit.

But it must not for a moment be supposed that the

situation was one in which the fortunate young critic brings fame to misunderstood and grateful genius starving in an attic. The facts are very different. Turner's position as one of the best, if not the best, landscape painter in England had been so long established, that the young lions of the reviews had got rather tired of him, and his fame, and his prices.[1]

It is, as has been said, a pity that Turner left no record of his impressions of Ruskin, but it is impossible that he should have done so . . . in language, at least. No doubt he was too tough, too queer, too successful, and too indifferent, to dislike Ruskin, as Jowett and Matthew Arnold were to dislike him later. He probably felt no dismay at the spectacle of this pampered young man with bright blue eyes, who was so convinced that everything in the world could be explained, and put into words. Even, he might have thought, if the voluble young man meant to expound him, meant to vindicate his endless experiments and changes of style – even then it did not matter. After all, what were critics? He could still sell a water-colour, sixteen by nine, for £70. Not bad, that, for a man who had had no advantages.

§ 4

Ruskin's acquaintance with Turner did not ripen into anything like a close friendship.

At the end of that anxious summer at Herne Hill, the cough came back, and the little spots of blood began to reappear on Ruskin's handkerchief. The rest and quiet had not cured the poor young man, and they set off rather sadly to try the change of air and scene which were always prescribed for patients 'in a decline.'

The whole family went together, as usual – Mr. Telford consented to sit in the counting-house for longer than usual this time if need were. This time Paris must be avoided,

[1] See Appendix A for a few further details of Turner's character.

for in Paris was the cause of all this sorrow. Ruskin was miserably unhappy, and occupied himself writing a bad poem in the manner of *Christabel*, which he called *The Broken Chain*, and in drawing ruins. Sometimes he would make a sketch (as one of the Château de Blois), which Papa and Mamma admired very much, and then they would proudly declare that Prout would give his ears to make such a drawing as that.

They went on to Italy, but John would not look at the pictures, for at this time he did not understand Italian painting, and only cared for Rubens, Van Dyck, and Velazquez.

And yet, though he was sick and sad enough, the journey was not without its humour, and he has preserved for us in *Præterita* a comic vision of the Ruskin family crossing a mountain torrent.

In those days there were very few bridges in Italy, and the people of the Riviera trusted to the slack of the water at the sea bar and the droughts of summer. There were only bridges at the big towns.

> '. . . The English carriage-and-four got across the shingle how it could; the boys of the village, if the horses could not pull it through, harnessing themselves in front.'

One day there was rain and a wild sirocco, and somewhere near Savona there was a pause at the brink of one of the streams, which was in sudden angry flood, and a conference was held as to whether the carriage could get through that day.

> 'Loaded, it could not, and everybody was ordered to get out and be carried across, the carriage to follow, in such shifts as it might. Everybody obeyed these orders, and submitted to the national customs with great hilarity, except my mother, who absolutely refused

to be carried in the arms of an Italian ragged opera hero, more or less resembling the figures whom she had seen carrying off into the mountains the terrified Taglioni, or Cerito. Out of the carriage she would not move, on any solicitation; – if they could pull the carriage through, they could pull her too, she said. My father was alike alarmed and angry, but as the surrounding opera corps de ballet seemed to look on the whole thing rather as a jest and an occasion for bajocco gathering, than any crisis of fate, my mother had her way; a good team of bare-legged youngsters was put to, and she and the carriage entered the stream with shouting. Two-thirds across, the sand was soft, and horses and boys stopped to breathe. There was another, and really now serious, remonstrance with my mother, we being all nervous about quicksands. But stir she would not; the horses got their wind again, and the boys their way, and with much whip-cracking and splashing, carriage and dama Inglese were victoriously dragged to dry land, with general promotion of good will between the two nations.'

But nature was revenged, and later a stream was reached that defeated even Margaret Ruskin.

[1] 'My mother had no choice really but between wading or being carried. She suffered the indignity, I think, with some feeling of its being a consequence of the French Revolution, and remained cross all the way to Carrara.'

But perhaps, to do her justice, Mrs. Ruskin was frayed in the temper for a better reason. It is thus that sorrow shows itself in some natures, and many people (including himself) thought that her son was dying.

[1] *Præterita.*

Nothing amused or seemed to distract his mind. When they got to Rome, St. Peter's disgusted him. The Capitol he thought a 'rubbishy square of average Palladian'; the Forum, 'a good group of smashed columns.' 'Just what, if it were got up, as it very easily might be, at Virginia Water, we should call a piece of humbug, the kind of thing that one is sick to death of in compositions.' The Colosseum he considered a public nuisance.

He was twenty-one, and his body cried out against being ill. His cough was bad, his eyes hurt him, he could not forget Adèle. At Christmas he had an attack of Roman fever. So the winter wore on.

They made some effort to get into touch with the English colony. Henry Acland, his Oxford friend, had, for instance, given Ruskin a letter of introduction to Joseph Severn (the friend of Keats), who was then living in Rome. There is a charming account in *Præterita* of his first encounter with Severn, whose family was afterwards to play so considerable a part in his life, and with Richmond, who was to draw 'The Author of *Modern Painters*' so delightfully.[1]

The acquaintance with the Severns and Richmond ripened. 'My father's and mother's quiet out-of-the-wayness soon pleased and at last won them.' They seemed to have preferred the parents to the son, who though he was said to have a 'poetical countenance' was yet perpetually firing up under their feet 'in little splutters and spitfires of the most appalling heresy.'

Severn and Richmond and Mr. and Mrs. Ruskin used to lay their heads together as to what was to be done to make Ruskin admire the authentic splendours of Rome and venerate the right pictures. He would not admire Titian, Raphael, or Domenichino, and found the sculpture galleries of the Vatican 'mere bewilderment and worry.' He was so perverse, for instance, as to go out and draw the old clothes

[1] See Frontispiece.

hanging out of the window of the Jews' Quarter, and was equally 'rude and restive, whether he was asked to go to a church, a palace, or a gallery.'

But there was one exception. It was possible to take Ruskin to hear musical church services. Had he a taste for Gregorian chants? He had none. But Miss Tollemache liked them. She was a fair English girl, the chief beauty that winter of the English circle in Rome. It was typical of the Ruskins that they never made her acquaintance.

Meanwhile, his father and Cousin Mary (whose opinion nobody ever asked) saw all the proper sights.

Half the time Ruskin was only cross because he could not enjoy Rome, because being Byronic is a strain, because he was tired of his walks there, and glad when it was time to turn back, and yet felt that he ought to be enjoying himself. He would look with envy at the nursemaids in the Pincio Gardens. There was one with a particularly pretty cap and piled and burnished hair. She sat laughing and chattering on a seat with another *bonne*. He looked at their plump happy faces.

How could they be so happy, he thought sulkily, when they were so heedless and ignorant and didn't know anything about the Alps or perspective or anything?

> [1] 'While I, with every feeling raised, I should think, to a great degree above theirs, was in a state of actually severe mental pain, because I could perceive materials of the highest pleasure around me, and felt the time hang heavy on my hands.'

The moral was never drawn.

Meanwhile, his mother would sit knitting quietly, in the corner of the great Roman room where they lodged – a room in which she cared for nothing but the cleanliness.

Naples was disappointing, too. It was thundery, it was

[1] *Præterita.*

cold, and there was delay about the passports. Ruskin lost his temper. True, the sea was blue, but it broke on black sand; and he was as horrified by the bad government as Byron had been. The modern life of Italy he saw as 'one captivity of shame and crime.'

Then, after his health had got rather better, he had a relapse.

> [1] 'In the gentle morning saunter through the shade, the cough came back – with a little darker stain on the handkerchief than usual. I sat down on a bank by the roadside, and my father's face was very grave. We got quietly back to the inn, where he found some sort of light carriole disposable, and set out, himself, to fetch the doctor from Rome. It has always been one of the great shadows of thought to me, to fancy my father's feelings as he was driven that day . . . across the Campagna. Good Dr. Gloag comforted him, and returned with him. But there was nothing new to be done, nor said. Such chance attack was natural in the spring, he said, only I must be cautious for a while. My mother never lost her courage for an instant. Next day we went on to Rome, and it was the last time the cough ever troubled me.'

They went on to Venice, and from Venice slowly home, as usual in the travelling chaise.

§ 5

But when they got home, though the cough was better, Ruskin was still ill, and was sent off to see a Dr. Jephson at Leamington, and this time alone. The treatment was curious. Dr. Jephson put him on salt water and iron, and dandelion-tea, and meals consisting of one dish – fish, meat

[1] *Præterita.*

or fowl as he chose, with bread and water only, and no vegetables or fruit – with walks in the morning and afternoon. It was a great change after Italy.

> [1] 'Here I was, in a small square brick lodging-house, number what you like of its row, looking out on a bit of suburban paddock, and a broken paling; mean litter everywhere about; the muddy lingering of Leam, about three yards broad, at the other side of the paddock; a ragged brambly bank at the other side of *it*. Down the row, beginnings of poor people's shops, then an aristocratic grocer and mercer or two, the circulating library, and the Pump Room.
> 'After the Bay of Naples, Mount Aventine, and St. Mark's Place, it felt like the first practical scene of a pantomime, after the transformation, and before the business begins. But I had been extremely dull under Mount Aventine; and did not, to my surprise, feel at all disposed to be dull here, – but somewhat amused, and with a pleasant feeling of things being really at last all right, for *me* at least; though it wasn't as grand as Peckwater, nor as pretty as St. Mark's Place. Anyhow, I was down to Croydon level again in the world; and might do what I liked in my own lodgings.'

So Ruskin bought himself a book in French upon fossil fish, some new paints, and some volumes of Captain Marryat; and he drew a picture in Turner's grandest manner of the Château of Amboise at sunset, with a bridge, and moon, and everything else planned in the highest style. And again nobody drew the moral.

After six weeks of this he was better. So much so that when Jephson, as farewell, told him to go on living on mutton and iron, he took to brown potatoes and cherry pie as soon as he was out of sight. Jephson advised him to

[1] *Præterita.*

take exercise and to swim in the sea; but Ruskin went on writing pathetic verse and trying to paint twilight like Turner. However, in spite of these unwholesome pursuits, he was better when he went back to his family at Herne Hill.

It was then that he first saw Turner's celebrated Swiss landscapes, some of the last that he painted before age tamed his eye and hand.

These water-colours gave Ruskin a great deal to think about. They were impressions from nature, not artificial designs like Turner's equally typical pictures of Carthage and Rome. Ruskin says that he was by this time very learned in Turner's principles of composition, but that it seemed to him that in these later subjects 'nature herself was composing with him.'

> 'Considering of these matters, one day on the road to Herne Hill, I noticed a bit of ivy round a thorn stem, which seemed even to my critical judgment, not ill "composed"; and proceeded to make a light-and-shade pencil study of it in my grey paper pocket-book, carefully, as if it had been a bit of sculpture, liking it more and more as I drew. When it was done, I saw that I had virtually lost all my time since I was twelve years old, because no one had ever told me to draw what was really there! Of course, I had the records of places, but had never seen the beauty of anything, not even of a stone – how much less of a leaf!'

CHAPTER VIII

Circa 1842–1847: Aged 22–28

'MODERN PAINTERS'

'Ruskin chercha la vérité, il trouva la beauté.'
Marcel Proust

§ 1

In May, 1842, Ruskin went up to Oxford to take his degree as a Bachelor of Arts.

And now came the question, what was this prodigy to do? He was twenty-two: his circle considered him a genius. But he was more or less constantly ill, and a further restriction upon his choice was that any occupation that would take him away from home was considered out of the question. It was not a matter of his having to earn money. James Ruskin had suffered too much from having had to market his brain before he came to manhood, not to be ready to spend his whole resources on safeguarding his son from any sort of exploitation. Indeed, this business of what Ruskin was to do was seen from quite another point of view, the problem was how he was to take his proper place in the world. His parents' hopes of him were so bright, and his promise known to such a wide circle of their aquaintance, and even of the public (through Loudon and *Friendship's Offering*), that the problem seems to have exercised them very much.

[1] 'Perhaps it may deserve some dim praise that I never seriously thought of leaving my father and mother to

[1] *Præterita.*

> explore foreign countries; and certainly the fear of grieving them was intermingled more or less with all my thoughts; but then, I did not much *want* to explore foreign countries. I had not the least love of adventure, but liked to have comfortable rooms always ordered, and a three-course dinner ready by four o'clock. Although no coward under circumstances of accidental danger, I extremely objected to any vestige of danger as a continuous element in one's life. I would not go to India for fear of tigers, nor to Russia for fear of bears, nor to Peru for fear of earthquakes; and finally, though I had no rightly glowing or grateful affection for either father or mother, yet as they could not well do without me, so also I found I was not altogether comfortable without *them*.

'Dim praise' is scarcely the comment with which the modern will receive this dreadfully frank statement of the case.

Finally, the question was shelved for that year at least. Ruskin's health being still very uncertain, it was decided that, as usual, a Tour would be the thing. Though they had only been home for a few months, it was settled that the whole family should once more go abroad, this time to Chamouni, the Rhine, and Flanders. Nor did their restlessness confine itself to the tour. They began to wonder whether they should not move to Denmark Hill.

This change of house was anxiously debated, and Ruskin shows us his father hesitating painfully over it. In the end they bought the new house. There was a stable, a farm-yard, a hay-stack, and a pigsty, and room for three cows. By the time the Swiss and Rhenish tour was over, the house had been prepared, and in October, 1842, the Ruskins moved into their new quarters. It was a squarish brick and stucco house, with a modest portico; it was retired and comfortable, plain and big, with a cedar and shrubberies in the front

garden, and at the back, beside the little estate just mentioned, a garden and glass-houses. Into the square solidity of this house, then, the bright Turners were carried, and the Titian, the Sir Joshuas and the Tintoret. After them the solid furniture and plate with 'R' on it, and last of all, very carefully, the sherry.

The spare-room bed – a great four-poster with yellow silk curtains – was set up, and old Anne the nurse, the maids and housekeeper had everything nice by the time the family came back.[1]

§ 2

Ruskin had some of the happiest hours of his life in this house, and his happiness began almost at once. For while the family debate as to what he should do was still dragging on, much as it had through Alpine passes and by German vineyards, a piece of work suddenly presented itself.

The newspaper critics began a campaign against Turner. Turner, like the painter in Mr. Arnold Bennett's *Buried Alive*, perversely refused to stick to the style in which he had made his reputation. The respectable thing for Turner would have been to go on painting arrangements of classical ruins and umbrella pines in tones of blue and brown whenever he was using oils, and gentlemen's seats and river banks in tones of green and grey when he was using water-colour. But Turner, at this time, was in a wild mood, and, – pressing on his experiments, always leaving what he could do for what he wanted to do, – was trying to paint the air and the light.

Perhaps this mood of Turner's is best expressed by his famous dying speech, 'The sun is God, my dear.' This was by no means a respectable sentiment for an elderly academician to have in his heart, nor were the groping, feverish, apocalyptic pictures, in which he expressed himself at this

[1] See *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton*, p. 353.

time, at all pleasant to the critics. They came very near, in their abuse of this latest manner of Turner's, to using the words which, thirty years later, Ruskin was to employ against Whistler, when he accused him of 'flinging a paint-pot in the face of the public.'

'This gentleman,' wrote the *Athenæum* critic, 'has on former occasions chosen to paint with cream or chocolate, yolk of egg, or currant jelly – here he uses his whole array of kitchen stuff.' Many of the other critics were as offensive.

Ruskin was furious, and resolved to vindicate Turner, not by mere counter-abuse, but by setting out the principles which underlie painting in general, and in particular the representation of natural objects. So in the autumn and winter of 1842, when he was twenty-three, he set seriously to work upon the book which first made him famous. It was the first volume of *Modern Painters*.

Mr. Collingwood, in his *Life*, gives a picture of Ruskin beginning *Modern Painters*, which could hardly be bettered.

> 'The neighbour, or the Oxonian friend, who called upon Mrs. Ruskin, in the autumn and winter of 1842, would learn that Mr. John was hard at work in his own study overhead. Those were its windows, on the second floor, looking out upon the front garden; the big dormer-window above was his bedroom, from which he had his grand view of lowland, and far horizon, and unconfined sky, comparatively clear of London smoke. In the study itself, screened from the road by russet foliage and thick evergreens, great things were going on. But Mr. John could be interrupted; would come running lightly downstairs, with both hands out to greet the visitor; would show the pictures, eagerly demonstrating the beauties of the last new Turners – Ehrenbreitstein and Lucerne, just acquired; and anticipating the sunset glories and mountain gloom

of the Goldau and Dazio Grande, which the great artist was "realizing" for him from sketches he had chosen at Queen Anne Street. He was very busy, but never too busy to see his friends; writing a book; and yet not to be "pumped" about it, for he had already adopted a motto which he has often repeated, "Don't talk about your work, but do it."

'And, the visitor gone, he would run up to his room and his writing, sure of the thread of his ideas and the flow of his language, with none of that misery and despair of soul which an interruption brings to many another author. In the afternoon his careful mother would turn him out for a tramp round the Norwood lanes; he might look in at the Poussins and Claudes of the Dulwich Gallery; or, for a longer excursion, go over to Mr. Thomas Windus, and his room full of Turner drawings; or sit to Mr. George Richmond for the second of the two protraits, the full-length with desk and portfolio, and Mont Blanc in the background.[1] After dinner, another hour or two's writing; and early to bed after finishing his chapter with a flourish of eloquence, to be read next morning at breakfast to father and mother and Mary – for from them it was no secret. The vivid descriptions of scenes yet fresh in their memory, or of pictures they treasured, the "thoughts" as they used to be called, allusions to sincere beliefs and cherished hopes, never failed to win the praise that pleased the young writer most, in happy tears of unrestrained emotion.'

§ 3

And what, the reader may ask, could there have been for Mrs. Ruskin and Mary to cry about in a book on æsthetics?

[1] See Frontispiece of present volume.

In *Modern Painters* there was a great deal. The book, like all Ruskin's books, by no means confines itself to its official subject. It is diffuse, entertaining, eloquent, exasperating, and intensely personal. We are plunged quite near the beginning into praise of a picture of Landseer's, and into the proposition, asserted (not suggested) that painting is merely a form of language. Not a language which will tell us truths about volume, colour and spatial relations such as could not be conveyed in words, but quite simply 'plot.' This picture of Landseer's, for example, is praised largely because it conveys to us a long story about an old man and his dog.

Thus early, in a writer who was to become one of the pre-Raphaelites' chief apologists, do we find the childish stress on anecdote, which was to become the 'fatal Cleopatra' of the pre-Raphaelite movement. If a story could be told, or a scientific fact conveyed, most of the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood were perfectly willing to subordinate tactile values, volume, and the play of light to it.

Then, when we have been exasperated by Ruskin's puerility about this Landseer, *The Old Shepherd's Chief Mourner*, and have been remorselessly told how touching and elevating are the spectacles in one corner of the picture, and the glimpse of bare cottage in the other, we come to quite an oasis of sense. Why, Ruskin asks, do we get a sense of power in sketches and unfinished pictures? He goes on to suggest that it is because here every stroke has a visible result, and the ratio of energy to effect is highest. None of the later strokes that shade and finish will be so powerful or decisive as these that first 'throw down the subject upon the canvas.'

How legitimately linked with eighteenth-century theory was Ruskin's æsthetic at its beginning, and how clearly its descent can be traced from Sir Joshua Reynolds' *Discourses*, is shown by the fact of Ruskin's calling one of his chapters

'The Sublime.' Painters in 1842 still wrote and spoke seriously of the 'grand manner,' and arranged pillars and corded curtains behind their sitters. Ruskin takes us out-of-doors. But in his early period he never praised slavish naturalism, except as an exercise.

> [1] 'The highest art is based on the sensations of peculiar minds, and on sensations occurring to them only at particular times. . . . The mind of the artist should be like a glass of sweet and strange colours, that gives new tones to what we see through it, and a glass of a rare strength and clearness, too, to let us see more than we could see for ourselves.'

But when a mediocre artist paints a faithful commonplace landscape, the painter has done only half his work, and 'the spectator finds himself alone in front of what is to all intents . . . a natural object. . . . The artist is his conveyance, not his companion; his horse, not his friend.'

Is it prejudice in the modern reader that makes him feel that the next bit was written, as Ruskin himself says somewhere of so much of his writing, 'to please Papa and to be corrected by Mr. Harrison'? For after this tribute to the artist he goes on to say that falsehood is revolting, to say that nature is immeasurably superior to anything that the human mind can conceive, and that every departure from her is a fall beneath her. Falsehood, he asserts, is a blot and a sin, and deception an injury.

Yet if we are in haste to condemn, and to reflect how a few words out of Bishop Berkeley might have saved Ruskin a great many thousand words, we must remember that he lived in an epoch when science was showing nature as incomparably more marvellous and intricate than had been guessed. It was difficult for anyone who (like Ruskin) was alive to this new intellectual development, not to be beaten

[1] *Modern Painters*, Vol. I.

to their knees by the new revelation. But the dogmatic manner is a real fault, and this defect is brought out a few pages later in another connection. Ruskin, when he discusses perspective, is perfectly sure, for instance, that the child, and the Red Indian, and the Chinaman, are wrong when they cannot recognize a drawing even of themselves, 'still less a daguerrotype.' He never flickers towards the idea that perhaps the adult Westerner may have evolved a convention, and may for convenience' sake have learned to see and to present things in that way. That the adult Westerner's machine for making 'sun pictures' saw them in the same way, probably only seemed to Ruskin a proof of the objective truth of Western convention, and not a proof of Western ingenuity in making machines.

Only in regard to colour does Ruskin rather grudgingly admit that we may not all see alike.

And yet, in Ruskin's pages there is nearly always some exquisite phrase or sentence that is like a caress. He writes of 'the broad, wild seashore, with its bright breakers and free winds.' Or of Salvator Rosa's 'animal restlessness and ferocity.' Indeed, once out of the region of metaphysics, religion or morality, Ruskin shows himself as a writer of incomparable flexibility and freedom.

> 'Rubens (he exclaims) paints an unconventional, unaffected landscape. His treatment is healthy, manly, and rational. Not very elegant, yet often condescending to minute and multitudinous details – always as far as it goes, pure, forcible and refreshing. He is vigorous in composition and marvellous in colour. The licences taken by Rubens are as bold as his general statements are sincere. In one of his landscapes sunbeams come from one part of the sky and the sun appears in the other. These bold and frank licences are usually characteristic of those minds whose grasp of nature is so

certain and extensive as to enable them fearlessly to sacrifice a truth of actuality to a truth of feeling.' [1]

Or, again, he is writing of a painter called Calcott, whose point of view Ruskin gives in one sparkling paragraph. 'He appears to have completed his pictures methodically, to have been content with them when completed, to have thought them good, legitimate, regular pictures, perhaps in some respects better than nature.'

We get a taste of another kind of wit when he says of certain late Italian painters that they 'address our lower faculties' by means of 'lampblack and lightning.'

§ 4

But perhaps the reader is still wondering what it was that made his parents shed those happy tears? It may have been the many edifying homilies on man's and nature's subjection to God, that moved James and Margaret Ruskin, or some other excursion into Evangelical theology, but in that case, the reader is merely reminded that he can verify his theory by procuring a copy of *Modern Painters* from any public library.

Why should we not, rather, suppose that his father's pleasure and emotion at any rate were purely æsthetic, and that it was at the beauty of some such passage as the following that he wept? He loved his boy, to the degree we have seen, and moreover he had been his travelling companion. Now suddenly, in the breakfast-room at Denmark Hill, there fell on his ear some of the loveliest, and now the most famous, cadences into which the English language has ever been woven.

> It had been wild weather when I left Rome, and all across the Campagna the clouds were sweeping in

[1] *Modern Painters*, Vol. I. (And now, how about every departure from nature being a fall beneath her?)

sulphurous blue, with a clap of thunder or two, and breaking gleams of sun along the Claudian aqueduct lighting up the infinity of its arches like the bridge of chaos. But as I climbed the long slope of the Alban Mount, the storm swept finally to the north, and the noble outline of the domes of Albano, and graceful darkness of its ilex grove, rose against pure streaks of alternate blue and amber; the upper sky gradually flushing through the last fragments of rain-cloud in deep palpitating azure, half ether and half dew. The noonday sun came slanting down the rocky slopes of La Riccia, and their masses of entangled and tall foliage, whose autumnal tints were mixed with the wet verdure of a thousand evergreens, were penetrated with it as with rain. I cannot call it colour, it was conflagration. Purple, and crimson, and scarlet, like the curtains of God's tabernacle, the rejoicing trees sank into the valley in showers of light, every separate leaf quivering with buoyant and burning life; each, as it turned to reflect or to transmit the sunbeam, first a torch and then an emerald. Far up into the recesses of the valley, the green vistas arched like the hollows of mighty waves of some crystalline sea, with the arbutus flowers dashed along their flanks for foam, and silver flakes of orange spray tossed into the air around them, breaking over the grey walls of rock into a thousand separate stars, fading and kindling alternately as the weak wind lifted and let them fall. Every blade of grass burned like the golden floor of heaven, opening in sudden gleams as the foliage broke and closed above it, as sheet-lightning opens in a cloud at sunset; the motionless masses of dark rock – dark though flushed with scarlet lichen, casting their quiet shadows across its restless radiance, the fountain underneath them filling its marble hollow with blue mist and fitful sound; and

over all, the multitudinous bars of amber and rose, the sacred clouds that have no darkness, and only exist to illumine, were seen in fathomless intervals between the solemn and orbed repose of the stone pines, passing to lose themselves in the last, white, blinding lustre of the measureless line where the Campagna melted into the blaze of the sea.'

It is a new note in English prose, and this cadence was not a chance rhythm. Ruskin kept the pattern of it, and when he was moved, and desired that the reader should feel with him, he could always return to its felicity.

The passage just quoted was soon to be famous, as was Ruskin's sumptuous description of Turner's *Slave Ship*.

Turner had set himself to paint 'the deep open sea' with his brush. Ruskin will do no less with his pen.

'It is a sunset on the Atlantic, after prolonged storm; but the storm is partially lulled, and the torn and streaming rain-clouds are moving in scarlet lines to lose themselves in the hollow of the night. The whole surface of sea included in the picture is divided into two ridges of enormous swell, not high, not local, but a low broad heaving of the whole ocean, like the lifting of its bosom by deep-drawn breath after the torture of the storm. Between these two ridges the fire of the sunset falls along the trough of the sea, dyeing it with an awful but glorious light, the intense and lurid splendour which burns like gold, and bathes like blood. Along this fiery path and valley, the tossing waves by which the swell of the sea is restlessly divided, lift themselves in dark, indefinite, fantastic forms, each casting a faint and ghastly shadow behind it along the illumined foam. They do not rise everywhere, but three or four together in wild groups, fitfully and furiously, as the under strength of the swell compels or

permits them; leaving between them treacherous spaces of level and whirling water, now lighted with green and lamp-like fire, now flashing back the gold of the declining sun, now fearfully dyed from above with the undistinguishable images of the burning clouds, which fall upon them in flakes of crimson and scarlet, and give to the reckless waves the added motion of their own fiery flying. Purple and blue and lurid shadows of the hollow breakers are cast upon the mist of night, which gathers cold and low, advancing like the shadow of death upon the guilty ship [1] as it labours amidst the lightning of the sea, its thin masts written upon the sky in lines of blood, girded with condemnation in that fearful hue which signs the sky with horror, and mixes its flaming flood with the sunlight, and, cast far along the desolate heave of the sepulchral waves, incarnadines the multitudinous sea.'

§ 5

The book was an immediate success. To look up *Modern Painters* in the index of almost any collection of letters written by one cultivated person to another is to find its praise. Charlotte Brontë is delighted with it beyond measure, it is praised to Elizabeth Barrett Browning; Miss Mitford is in raptures; Tennyson, who is too poor to buy it, takes infinite trouble in arranging to borrow it; Wordsworth is reading it up at Rydal Mount, and is telling everyone that its author, 'the Oxford graduate,' is a brilliant writer. The poet Rogers, that Merovingian king of English letters, allows it, as has been said, to lie upon his table. The reviews discussed it at length and with every mark of approbation. Most significant of all, a certain little coterie of painters who

[1] She is a slaver, throwing her slaves overboard. The near sea is encumbered with corpses.

were too poor to buy it borrowed a copy of it at Oxford. William Morris and Burne-Jones read it aloud to one another; their friend Holman Hunt, painting in London, said that it seemed to have been written expressly for him, and singled out a passage upon student work which became the chief apologia for his pictures.

> 'From young artists nothing ought to be tolerated but simple *bona-fide imitation* of nature. They have no business to ape the execution of masters; to utter weak and disjointed repetitions of other men's words, and mimic the gestures of the preacher, without understanding his meaning or sharing in his emotions. We do not want their crude ideas of composition, their unformed conceptions of the Beautiful, their unsystematized experiments upon the Sublime. We scorn their velocity; for it is without direction; we reject their composition; for it is without materials; we reprobate their choice; for it is without comparison. Their duty is neither to choose, nor compose, nor imagine, nor experimentalize; but to be humble and earnest in following the steps of nature, and tracing the finger of God.'

There was a good deal of speculation as to who the author of this remarkable book could be, for Ruskin wrote under the pseudonym of 'An Oxford Graduate.' The academicians and established painters who found themselves praised in it were not quite so enthusiastic as the public, and we are told that Turner, the dogged old professional, 'said little about it.'

During the winter of 1844–5, refreshed by the usual Tour with his parents and Osborne Gordon, Ruskin seems to have intended to get on with the second volume; but found himself instead in a 'cyclone of new knowledge,' and spent most of the time drawing, instead of writing. The Tour had taken them to the Alps and to Paris, where Ruskin spent a good deal of time at the Louvre, and he partly spent

the winter drawing because he felt that he must go back to Italy and study the early Christian painters before he set to work on his second volume. But it seemed a pity to wait till August when Papa could leave the sherry business. And now for the first time, when he was twenty-six and famous, Ruskin was allowed to go abroad by himself. His father and mother felt most anxious about him, in spite of the fact that he took a travelling servant beside his valet George, and Couttet the guide. George was a charming person, but he did not altogether care about foreign parts. 'Oh, sir,' he said to Ruskin when they reached Italy, in June, 'think of them at home, walking in the acacia walk, and eating as many strawberries as they like, and having all the blinds down in the library; and here we are, without a breath of air, and must not eat anything.' Ruskin tried to interest George in his own proceedings, and pointed out to him the actual landscape from which a Turner drawing at Denmark Hill had been painted. George did not recognize it at first, but Ruskin showed him how it had been adapted. 'Well,' said George finally, 'he is a cunning old gentleman, to be sure, just like Mrs Todgers, dodging among the tender pieces with a fork.' 'George's criticism of Turner's composition has often been made in more pretentious language,' remarks Cook, who quotes the passage.

At Padua Ruskin had a sore throat and kept his bed, so he sent George out to buy a scrap of a picture to hang in his bedroom to cheer him up. 'He brought me a seven-inch square bit of fifteenth-century tempera, a nameless saint with a scarlet cloak and an embossed nimbus, who much comforted me.'

Ruskin read a chapter of the Bible every morning and evening with George, and the service on Sunday if there was no English church to go to.

Couttet, the Swiss guide, was a cheerful, successful person who had a large, detached affection for Ruskin.

> [1] 'He could scarcely read and write, knew no language but his own. After lunch (says Ruskin) when he had had his half-bottle of Savoy wine, he would, as we walked up some valley in the afternoon light, give me a little lecture on Philosophy: and after I had fatigued and provoked him with less cheerful views of the world, he would fall back to my servant behind me and console himself with a shrug of his shoulders. "Le pauvre enfant, il ne sait pas vivre." '

But this belief did not prevent Couttet from holding an umbrella over Ruskin while he sketched.

Presently this odd party came down to Florence, a town which Couttet despised, and in which he found himself out of temper.

> 'He solaced himself by making a careful collection of all the Florentine wild-flowers for me, exquisitely pressed and dried . . . but they fretted me by bulging always in the middle, and crumbling like parcels of tea over my sketches.'

But in spite of Couttet's disapproval, this time spent at Florence was one of the happiest interludes in Ruskin's life. He seems to have spent most of his days in the monasteries, studying Ghirlandajos at Santa Maria Novella, or drawing the Fra Angelico Annunciation in what he calls the monastery's 'small ecclesiastical pantry.' Here the monks would be all about him, rinsing cups and folding up copes. From these monks he used to buy little bottles an inch long, full of the perfume that they distilled from the herbs and flowers in the monastery garden. Up at Fiesole he went haymaking with the brothers.

But at last, to Couttet's great joy, he turned back to the hills, and in the rough mountain inns Couttet could busy

[1] *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 4.

himself in his favourite pursuits, such as cooking the dinner, going out to gather wild strawberries for tea, and mulling wine in the evening.

All this travelling was done in a special carriage, a little brougham, which Ruskin had had made for him, with any quantity of front and side pockets. It was hung low with a fixed side-step, so that he might get in and out, even when the horses were trotting.

But though he was such a luxurious traveller, still his father and mother fussed by every post, and not only did he write to them every day, but had constantly to reassure them. 'I am very cautious about ladders,' he writes, 'try the steps thoroughly and hold hard with both hands,' or again, 'I will take great care with boats at Baveno, merely using them on calm afternoons for exercise' – and so on endlessly.

He wrote, as has been said, every day.

> 'It is only four weeks more, you know, after you receive this that we shall see each other again. I assure you it will not be longer than I can help. Not even Venice will keep me longer than is absolutely necessary; and then I hope I shall write a very nice book, and one that I need not be ashamed of.'

But though before he had not been particularly struck, on this visit to Venice, Ruskin was overwhelmed by the magnificence of the pictures. He fell in with other painters and other English people at Danieli's Hotel, and worked feverishly there; and it is from this visit to Venice that we can trace the monumental study which he undertook four years later, his *Stones of Venice*. He worked incessantly on this occasion, and with the greatest enthusiasm, copying, measuring, and above all, gazing – especially at Tintorettos.

He writes to his father:

> 'I have had a draught of pictures to-day enough to

drown me. I never was so utterly crushed to the earth before any human intellect as I was to-day – before Tintorett. Just be so good as to take my list of painters and put him in the school of art at the top – top – of everything, with a great big black line underneath him to stop him off from everybody. . . . He took it so entirely out of me to-day that I could do nothing at last but lie on a bench and laugh. . . . Tintorett don't seem able to stretch himself till you give him a canvas forty feet square, and then – he lashes out like a leviathan, and heaven and earth come together.'

Couttet told him he was doing too much, and sure enough, he was quite ill on the way home. This illness Couttet strove against with medicines, Ruskin met it with prayer; and this time Ruskin had the experience (rare with him, though pretty general in Evangelical circles) of reaching a sense of direct relationship with Heaven. The sensation made him extremely happy.

But when he got home, faith left him again. However, this did not much trouble him, for these deep draughts in Venice had given him a fresh sense of his mission.

It is to be noticed that in almost every case when Ruskin proselytized about a picture, it was with a practical purpose. These Tintorettos, for instance, were neglected and cobweb-covered: in many cases the roof above them was faulty and the rain dripped through them. Ruskin was in a very literal sense a champion come to the aid of beauty that was in real danger of perishing; and if we remember this his vehemence seems more excusable.

§ 6

It was November, 1845, when Ruskin got back to his parents at Denmark Hill. He found that his first volume

had gone into a third edition. He had been nearly three years collecting the material for the second volume; but he was not more than five months over the actual composition.

But it must be confessed that to the reader of to-day, at any rate, the second volume seems very much less glittering than the first. The first half of it reads like a sermon, and the whole volume is overlaid with the dogmatic theology which appeared occasionally in the first. There are in it beautiful pieces of description, there are intelligent remarks on individual pictures; but on the whole it is likely that many readers may feel the second volume to be a provincial, and even absurd, piece of work.

The book had, however, to its contemporaries a very distinct practical value: for it was the best guide-book to Italian pictures of the time up to and including Tintoretto. Lord Lindsay in his *Christian Art* was to touch to some extent on the subject; but his book seems not to have been very widely read, and therefore to most of Ruskin's travelling or touring readers the second volume of *Modern Painters* had a practical use.

But if the volume only took Ruskin five months to compose, they were very hard-working months. By April, 1846, he was very tired, and the usual cure of a Tour was resorted to. This time he went with his parents.

They found that he had grown and developed a good deal in the seven months that he had spent as an independent human being, and the change was not altogether liked by them. The old Ruskins had always understood and shared their son's delight in natural scenery, but now appeared a new development. Ruskin was giving a great deal of his mind to Gothic mouldings, and very early Italian art. His father sighed. He was growing old, and had followed his son some considerable way already. James Ruskin writes to W. H. Harrison from Venice (May, 1846):

> 'He is cultivating art at present, searching for real knowledge, but to you and me this is at present a sealed book. It will neither take the shape of picture nor poetry. It is gathered in scraps hardly wrought, for he is drawing perpetually, but no drawing such as in former days you or I might compliment in the usual way by saying it deserved a frame; but fragments of everything from a Cupola to a Cartwheel, but in such bits that it is to the common eye a mass of Hieroglyphics – all true – Truth itself, but Truth in mosaic.'

Upon this letter Ruskin's biographer, Cook, comments as follows:

> 'The letter is not without its note of pathos to the sympathetic ear. The father had hoped to see his son become a Bishop, and the Church had been given up; to see him become a second Byron, and poetry was now written no more. He had made some mark with his drawings, and now he only did architectural jottings. *Modern Painters* was winning for him a literary reputation; yet he showed no disposition to finish the book.'

When the Ruskins came back from the Continent in 1846, Ruskin, who in the second volume had dropped his pseudonym, found himself with a very greatly enlarged circle of acquaintances, and with a very considerable literary reputation; and several fresh names, some of them momentous to the subject of this study, enlarged the circle of his intimates.

PART II

CHAPTER IX

Circa 1846–1848: Aged 27–29

EUPHEMIA GRAY

§ 1

In the spring of 1846, when Ruskin came back to London, this second volume of *Modern Painters* was out.

The sequel, if it now appears inferior, seems to have pleased its audience, and certainly contributed to Ruskin's steadily growing reputation. Books had a much longer life then than now, and the first volume, now three years old, was still in circulation among the intelligentsia. Ruskin began to find himself famous, and for the first time to be asked out a good deal to dinners and parties. Among his new hostesses was a certain Lady Davey. At her parties, besides such comfortable wits and men of letters as Sydney Smith and Monckton Milnes, Ruskin used to meet Sir Walter Scott's son-in-law and biographer, Lockhart. An extraordinary glamour surrounded Scott, and in his light Lockhart and his daughter shone.

Lockhart, though he was at this time editor of the powerful *Quarterly*, was an extremely shy man, and probably showed his 'melancholy Spanish head' at Lady Davey's parties quite as much to please his pretty daughter, Charlotte, as to feed his magazine. To Ruskin, Charlotte's charms were very much increased by his innocent literary snobbery.

She was a small fairy-like person with a high forehead, and was being much courted that year in London, and so was presumably attractive in her own person. But to Ruskin she seems at first to have been above all Scott's granddaughter. She soon became to Ruskin 'a Scottish fairy, White Lady and witch of the fatallest sort, looking as if she had just risen out of the stream.' But somehow their acquaintance did not prosper.

'I never could come to any serious speech with her,' Ruskin says plaintively, and describes how at a dinner party he disputed with Gladstone across her about the state of prisons in Naples. This method of courtship fell flat, nor would more appropriate methods have succeeded, for the fact was that Charlotte, unknown even to her father, had another young man in view, and carefully avoided poor Ruskin. He, knowing nothing of this, struggled on. At last Lockhart asked him to review Lord Lindsay's book on *Christian Art* for the *Quarterly*. Ruskin felt this was a great chance of winning Charlotte, and though he was shy of the task, being well aware that Lord Lindsay knew much more about Italian painting than he did, he undertook the review. 'I thought no one else likely to do it better, and had another motive to the business – of an irresistible nature.'

So Ruskin, decidedly in love, went, with what he calls his 'usual wisdom in such matters,' into Cumberland, there to recommend himself to his Charlotte by writing a *Quarterly* review. But this elegant device succeeded no better than Neapolitan prisons. Besides, when Lockhart got the MS. he at once wrote asking Ruskin to cut out all his best bits, and shocked Ruskin profoundly by insisting that a criticism of a certain Gally Knight should be left out, 'because he was a protégé of Albemarle Street.'

But Ruskin is cruel to himself in representing his ill success as due entirely to his own clumsiness. Mr. Hope had been courting before him, and had long been preferred.

§ 2

It was about this time that Ruskin began to write some of his best letters to an old literary friend of his father's and mother's, Mary Russell Mitford, author of *Our Village*, otherwise a competent hack-writer, and now a woman of sixty, who was both poor and merry. Though she persistently lived in the country and had for years been saddled with a disreputable old father, she was a sort of professional gossip and the friend and correspondent of nearly all the notables of her day.

It was with this odd little person that Ruskin began to correspond. Miss Mitford was delighted with the son of her old friend, and her opinion is perhaps worth quoting. She was a better judge of a man than many old ladies, for she had, as she said, not only known all the literary characters of her period, but had, on account of her father, 'lived among fox-hunters and coursers all the days of my life.' The new young man was instantly approved. 'Mr. Ruskin is certainly the most charming person I have ever known. His books are very beautiful, although I do not agree in all the opinions. But the young man himself is just what, if one had a son, one should have dreamt of his turning out – in mind, manner, conversation, everything. He has been here two or three times. He is by far the most eloquent and interesting young man that I have ever seen, grace itself and sweetness.'

Why could not Charlotte have thought so, too?

§ 3

In Ruskin's life, as in the world at large, a storm was obviously blowing up by the autumn of 1847. Ruskin, partly perhaps from not knowing its cause, took Charlotte Lockhart's insensibility very much to heart. As usual when he was disappointed in love, he got extremely ill, so his

parents packed him off again to Leamington, where he complains of his eyes and his cough and a pain in his back. From Leamington he travelled on to Scotland, staying with his acquaintances or at inns. A young laird took him out shooting, which he disliked. The scenery was beautiful, but gave him no pleasure: this being miserable in beautiful places always made everything much worse – in short, he was wretched. His letters to his father changed in character: he was miserable enough to want to have it out on someone.

He wrote moodily, and too frankly dragging up old grievances. They were cruel letters for a man like James Ruskin to receive from his son. But at no time does Ruskin's father appear in so amiable and so dignified a light as in his replies to these letters. It was a strange correspondence: on both sides there is apparently a vigorous effort to carry their relation on to a better level, to reach absolute candour, and to arrive at a pitch of understanding and friendship that ought most probably never to have been attempted.

For it was surely impossible that the pace of these two men's minds and emotions could be adjusted and synchronized without injury to both.

The attempt to stabilize a new relationship, or at least to improve upon the old understanding, was made, however, and with what result we shall see.

Meanwhile, supposing that a perfect friendship should, or could, have been established between such a father and son, then that friendship could hardly, perhaps, have had a better foundation than the letter which James Ruskin wrote in answer to his son's complaints.

Ruskin has written saying that he feels 'utterly downhearted,' that he feels changed, and sees everything as irremediably ancient and hopeless. Then things seem better and the mood lightens. With characteristic delicacy his father does not embark on his long analysis and defence until his son begins to write a little more normally. But as soon as

the black dog shows signs of departure, and Ruskin's letters grow 'more cheerful and confiding in tone,' he confesses that some of his son's recent letters had 'dulled his spirits.'

> 'They disclosed that, more than I had had an idea of, we had been, from defects perhaps on both sides, in a state of "progression by antagonism," each discerning half the truth, and supposing it the whole. I suppose we may have mutually defrauded each other's character of its right and merit. . . . I read more of the suffering and unpleasantness I had unwittingly in part inflicted on you in past hours. To my memory they are burdened with no greater share of trouble than attaches, I believe, to most families since the fall. . . . I was exceedingly wrong and shortsighted in all interruptions occasioned to your pursuits. Mamma says I am very exacting (about proof-reading and revising). . . . Whilst reading now this unlucky first volume for press, I had by me some loose proof-sheets for second, and I have been so struck with the superiority of second volume, and so positively surprised at the work, that I became angry with myself for having, by my impatience and obstinacy about the one thing, in any way checked the flight or embarrassed the course of thoughts like these, and arrested such a mind in its progress in the track and through the means which to itself seemed best for aiming at its ends. You will find me from conviction done with asking you to do anything not thought proper by yourself to do. I call this reading with profit and to the purpose. Two points in your letters I only remember half distressed me, and perhaps they were merely illustrative as used by you. You say we could not by a whole summer give you a tenth of the pleasure that to have left you a month in the Highlands in 1838 would have done, nor by buying

Turner and Windus's gallery the pleasure that two Turners would have done in 1842, you having passed two or three years with a sick longing for Turner. I take blame to myself for not sending you to the Highlands in 1838 and not buying you a few more Turners; but the first I was not at all aware of, and the second I freely confess I have been restrained in from my very constitutional prudence. . . . I have, you know, my dearest John, two things to do, to indulge you and to leave you and Mamma comfortably provided for . . . but if you have any longings like 1842 I should still be glad to know them, whilst I honour you for the delicacy of before suppressing the expression of them. . . . On the subject noticed in one of your letters on our different regard for public opinion, this is a malady or weakness with me, arising from want of self-respect. The latter causes much of my ill temper, and when from misunderstanding or want of information I was losing some respect for you, my temper got doubly bad. We are all wanting in our relations towards the Supreme Being, the only source of peace and self-respect. But I never can open my soul to human beings on holy subjects. . . .'

There is something terrible in such minuteness of memory on both sides. We seem to see two spirits handcuffed together. And by what? Meantime, while Ruskin was thus away, his parents cast about for some practical means of setting their family life upon a better basis. It was then that Mrs. Ruskin thought of an expedient. It seemed to them clear that their son's fresh disappointment in love was to a great extent the cause both of his ill temper and – more serious – of his ill health. It really began to seem to Mrs. Ruskin that John was going to break his heart by for ever running after unsuitable girls. (Would it be

believed, this Charlotte was another Papist!) Neither of the girls with whom he had so far been in love would really be in the least likely to make him happy. Nothing could be clearer than that, if he had married either of them, things would never have been the same again. They would never have fitted in with the Tours or any of the rest of it. It was plain that Ruskin would never choose prudently for himself, and equally true that he ought soon to settle.

The Ruskins had a pair of friends and distant kinspeople called Gray, who lived in Perth. The Grays had been to stay with them more than once at Herne Hill, and it was for their daughter Euphemia, then a child, that Ruskin, five or six years before, had written his solitary fairy tale, 'The King of the Golden River.'

As soon, then, as Ruskin had come home, his mother invited Euphemia Gray to stay in the house, with every intention that he should marry her. She was young, lively, pretty, rather shrewd, rather hard, and, at that time, entirely inexperienced.

The story is told by Holman Hunt, who, as we shall see, was later in a very fair way to hear the truth of it. 'Phemy,' he says, 'played up just as Mrs. Ruskin had hoped, and soon showed untiring interest in the art questions which her Cousin John was pursuing.' He took her about to galleries and exhibitions, to the great satisfaction of his parents.

His mother, Hunt goes on, told him how pleased they were with his gentleness to his Cousin Euphemia. She further 'assured him that his attachment was of a tender nature,' and begged him 'to make them all happy by declaring his affection for the lady.'

Ruskin was horrified, said they were mistaken, expressed surprise and regret, and said he would see her no more. Upon that his mother appeared to capitulate, and soothed him to a renewal of the position, by begging him to forget that he had ever been misunderstood.

And so, in this situation, the winter of 1847 wore on. Again Ruskin took Effie to galleries, and still she interested herself in his pursuits. Margaret Ruskin was well satisfied. At last, according to Holman Hunt, his mother spoke once more to Ruskin, 'much more pressingly.' She assured him 'that though he did not recognize the fact himself, she and his father were convinced that he was deeply enamoured of his cousin.' Ruskin's biographer, Cook, has summed up the situation. 'They saw in a marriage with Euphemia the means by which they might gain a daughter and not lose a son.'

Ruskin did not know what to do. He still said that it was impossible that he should love Euphemia, but his defences were weakening. The rebellious mood of the Scotch visit had gone. Perhaps he may have thought that as he could not have either of his real loves – neither Adèle nor Charlotte, he might just as well please his parents. He perhaps thought (mistakenly) that he could at least be friends with Effie.

By January, 1848, Euphemia was back in Perth, and Ruskin was writing to her pretty constantly, so much so that he explains the fewness of the entries in his diary by saying, 'My diary has of late been in letters to E. C. G.'

It is significant that Ruskin never mentions his wife in *Præterita*, nor the least circumstance of this particular period. But he must have proposed and been accepted by letter. Early in April Ruskin went to Scotland, and on April 10, 1848, without apparently any family festivity, and almost certainly in the absence of his parents, he and Euphemia were quietly married in the Grays' drawing-room. There are no letters of congratulation and no flavour of joy has come down from this odd wedding.

He not only did not love her, but he loved somebody else. No good to Euphemia, his parents, or anybody else, came of Ruskin's strange half-obedience.

The marriage service read, the young couple set out for the Lakes.

CHAPTER X

Circa 1848: Aged 29

THE YEAR OF REVOLUTION

§ 1

Though the psycho-analyst might be ready, without going farther, to trace Ruskin's illness and wretchedness all through his courtship and honeymoon to the unfortunate state of his love affairs, and of his relations with his parents, the biographer is obliged now also to take cognizance of a new element in Ruskin's life. This is not hard, for at the moment at which this narrative has arrived the element was certainly intrusive enough.

1848 is famous in European history as the year of revolution. Behind the barricades of Paris we see a vista of revolutions – in Italy and in Germany. In England, too, the poverty of the industrial population found a voice. The Chartists demanded political justice, and, when there seemed every prospect of their monster petition being ineffective, and their demands disregarded, the miseries of the people whom they represented broke out into rioting. The great French Revolution was still a living memory, the industrial proletariat was still a new and menacing factor, and if we turn to contemporary records we find a sense of extreme agitation. The anonymous author of the *Annual Register* is stirred to eloquence.

'The fountains of the great deep of political society have

been suddenly and violently broken up . . . the ultimate results of it it is impossible to predict or foresee. The year 1848 will be hereafter known as that of the great and general revolt of nations against their rulers. Within the short space of twelve months centuries seem to have rolled away.'

Private letters exchanged by the sort of people with whom Ruskin had been mixing in London this year were full of alarms.

'What agitates me is this (Matthew Arnold writes). If the new state of things succeeds in France, social changes are inevitable here and elsewhere. The spectacle of France is likely to breed great agitation here, and such is the state of our masses that their movements can now only be brutal, blundering and destroying.

'Yet if they wait there is no one to train them (he exclaims). The deep ignorance of the middle and upper classes and their feebleness of vision are becoming, if possible, every day more apparent.'

England trembled at the spectacle of the 'idea-moved masses' of France.

[1] 'Here in London the aristocracy are overwhelmed with gloom (writes the American Ambassador). In the Court circle I alone am the one to think and speak of the French Republic with hope, with subdued exultation, with trust. The Queen was greatly agitated. If France succeeds, there will not be a crown left in Europe in twenty years, except in Russia, and perhaps England.'

Louis Blanc's assertion of the 'right to work,' and the

[1] *Carlyle at his Zenith.* Wilson.

general swing of French thought towards economic as well as political change, was what most alarmed and outraged the English manufacturing interest. They mocked and reviled the French Provisional Government for its ridiculous and even blasphemous interest in trade. Carlyle's voice was almost alone.

> [1] 'Hardly since the invasion of the wild Teutons and wreck of the old Roman Empire (says Carlyle) has there been so strange a Europe, all turned topsy-turvy. . . . All over London people are loud upon the French. Right to hurl out Louis Philippe, most of us said or thought, but here, I think, our approval ended. The "what next?" upon which the French had been thinking, none of our people will seriously ask themselves. I, in vain, strive to explain that this of the "organization of labour" is precisely the question of questions for all governments whatsoever; that it vitally behoved the poor "French Provisional" to attempt a solution.'

But the Government workshops remained the horror of horrors. Meanwhile, in England events became alarming.

In London on April 10 (the day on which Ruskin married Euphemia at Perth), 'the disciples of physical force' (to quote the *Annual Register* once more) 'organized, under the banner of Chartism, a grand display of their strength and numbers'; and after their meeting at Kennington Common a monster petition was presented, demanding annual parliaments, universal suffrage, equal electoral districts, no property qualification, and payment of members.

Ruskin had begun to read the newspapers that winter. From January in that year they had been full of the great events that were agitating France. The French news was told by the Press in England with extraordinary impressive-

[1] *Carlyle at his Zenith.* Wilson.

ness and picturesqueness. Carlyle's *French Revolution* (which, it must be remembered, the revolutionary events of 1830 had inspired him to write) was an extremely popular book and fresh in people's minds. Nobody knew what might come of this new revolution. There were sinister echoes. Verses from the old songs sounded down the streets of Paris and were flung over the barricades:

'Mourir pour la patrie,
C'est le sort le plus beau,
Le plus digne d'envie.'

Even the fearful 'Carmagnole' was heard. To an English upper class reared on Scott, kings might be heroes or villains, but once more they had glamour. Now it seemed likely that they might all lose their crowns, if not their heads. Louis Philippe had escaped to England. The Provisional Government had shown a contemptuous lack of desire to capture him, and he arrived here on board a steam-packet. True, he was rather unromantically dressed in a pair of grey trousers, a red-and-white comforter, a week's beard, and a rough pea-jacket, still, he was a King and could presumably be died for.

It was quite difficult to get to know even the most salient facts. Rival sympathizers declared that the Tuileries had, and had not, been looted to the strains of the *Marseillaise*. The *Annual Register* is sure that it had been looted, and shows us a picture. We see Louis Philippe's great state bed: on it several ouvriers are lying quietly smoking, their faces are blackened with powder, but now they are resting from the excitements and terrors of the life they had led while the barricades were up. They are talking less about the flight of the King than about the right to work; they are not very bloodthirsty, but they are talking not so much politics, as economics. This was the most revolutionary of revolutionary facts.

Lamartine's Provisional Government was trying, with the help of Louis Blanc and a torrent of talk, to reorganize industry. Robert Owen, the 'father of English Socialism,' went over in the spirit of 'Nunc Dimitis' to see this portent. But he was old and feeble, and even more theoretical by now than Lamartine's Government.

Trade, as always before a revolution,[1] was in a very bad state, and the first economic thought which seems to have occurred to the Provisional Government was 'to take possession of all establishments about to suspend their works.' Owners were to be compensated; there was to be an extremely full and extremely ill-defined measure of workers' control. There was also considerable linking up of industries, and this linking was to work along both horizontal and vertical lines, while groups of industries, each workshop apparently controlled by public debate, were to be centralized under a sort of national industrial board.

However, the Left wing in Paris saw the hopelessness of such a programme and refused to adopt it if only on the ground that far too much was to be paid to these owners who had been, anyhow, 'about to suspend their works.' This revolt of the Left against the workshop scheme brought about a state of riot and chaos in Paris which the respectable English politicians greeted with 'I told you so.' That, they did not fail to remark, was what inevitably happened when governments gave way to the people.

There seemed no end to all the commotion. Amid much tragedy, one small but comic event stands out. Lord Brougham, travelling through France a week after Ruskin's wedding, not only had much of his luggage stopped as being too much for a good citizen, but three times between Lyons and Paris was forced to get out of his carriage to salute trees of liberty.

[1] See further discussion of this point on p. 325.

§ 2

All these events profoundly shocked and bewildered Ruskin. He had been brought up upon doctrines of obedience and law and order; he was sure that the element of tragedy in human affairs is always to be avoided; he believed in the sinfulness of man and the wise ordering of Providence; and he felt nothing but horror and panic at the spectacle of the Paris streets. The struggle outside mirrored to poor Ruskin the struggle within.

For the fact was that he had not brought himself to obey his parents except in name. Ten days after they had left Perth his marriage to Euphemia had not been consummated.

Ruskin is the most fastidious of creatures, and he has never loved this girl. He does not even hate her. But the thing is impossible. He can tell no one. What is he to do, to whom can he turn? For 'Phemie's sake, for he does not hate her, he must keep up appearances: he is half distracted – torn this way and that. At last, on that dreadful honeymoon, he takes up his pen and writes – of all people – to funny old Miss Mitford, pouring out sentence after sentence, coming near to what he wants to say, and then taking refuge in politics again, then trying to make little jokes and be correct.

> '. . . The events on the Continent [were] fraught to me with very deep disappointment, and cast me into a depression and fever of spirit which, joined with some other circumstances nearer home, have, until now I am resting with my kind wife among these quiet hills, denied me the heart to write cheerfully to those very dear friends to whom I would fain never write sadly. . . . I am sure you will allow me to bring my young wife to be rejoiced (under the shadow of her new and grievous lot) by your kind comforting. But pray keep

her out of your garden, or she will certainly lose her wits with pure delight, or perhaps insist on staying with you and letting me find my way through the world by myself, a task which I should not *now* like to undertake.'

He would be happy, he goes on, but for the wild storm-clouds bursting on Italy and France, and all his earthly treasures perilled amid the tumult of the people.

'. . . These are not times for watching clouds or dreaming over quiet waters, more serious work is to be done, and the time for endurance has come rather than for meditation, and for hope rather than for happiness. Happy those whose hope, without this severe and tearful rending away of all the props and stability of earthly enjoyments, has been fixed "where the wicked cease from troubling." Mine was not; it was based on "those pillars of the earth" which are "astonished at His reproof. . . ."

'My wife begs me to return her sincere thanks for your kind message, and to express to you the delight with which she looks forward to being presented to you – remembering what I told her among some of my first pleadings with her that, whatever faults she might discover in her husband, he could at least promise her friends whom she would have every cause to love and to honour. She needs them, but I think also deserves them. . . .'

No, it is no use. There is nothing to be done and nothing to be said.

By the first of May Ruskin and Effie were at home again, and Ruskin found a wedding present from his friend George Richmond.

It was a drawing of his father. He is so glad, he writes

to Richmond, that the painter has chosen 'that look of gentleness rather than a more frequent (not more characteristic) gloom or severity.'

By May, things are no better at home, and are worse abroad. Italy has declared war upon Austria, and Ruskin goes on, writing to Richmond, to mourn over Milan and Verona which are now in the theatre of war. 'I feel very doubtful whether I am not wasting my life, and very sad about it.' Ruskin had interrupted the miserable honeymoon to come home and correct the proofs of a second edition of *Modern Painters*. This done, he and Effie had gone off in hopes of a little gaiety to Commemoration at Oxford. She seemed fonder of parties than he remembered. Thence they started off on what was meant to be a pilgrimage to a number of English cathedrals and abbeys. But for certain circumstances this might have been a very pleasant plan, but in the first place Ruskin's father and mother accompanied them; in the second, Ruskin insisted on taking measured drawings from morning till night; and in the third (owing perhaps to the sum of the first two) Ruskin was soon overtaken by a feverish attack.

Even his father was bored on this journey, let alone his young wife. 'My son,' James Ruskin writes from Salisbury to Harrison, 'occupies himself with the architecture of the cathedral, a lovely edifice, but I find it very slow.' However, the fever at least put an end to boredom, and sent them all four quickly back to Denmark Hill. Ruskin's biographer, Cook, relates that once at home Ruskin was 'laid up by his mother in pillows and coverlets.'

However, in the first week in August Ruskin was well enough to go off with Effie to Normandy: James Ruskin seeing them off as far as Boulogne. Cook relates that 'every day of the next eleven weeks was spent in measuring, note-taking and sketching.' He seems to have decided to take no notice of Euphemia, as they travelled about. He used

to get up at six and read before breakfast, which they took at eight. By 9.30 he had started his sketching or his measuring. They dined at 1.30, and again from four to six he sketched. George, his valet, was made to trace bas-reliefs and panels: Euphemia was set to post up his diary. Ruskin, however, was not only running away and taking refuge in work, but was not unreasonably persuaded that the Gothic buildings which he was drawing would not be there long to shed their influence. The two forces which threatened architecture at that time were revolution and restoration. Restoration was most to be dreaded in this case, apparently.

> 'We have met with sensible and agreeable people, and *all* are *so far* sensible, that we have not spoke to one person who does not regret all that has lately happened of the tumult and disorder, for the substantial reason that all have suffered for it. But the mental and moral degradation are beyond all I conceived – it is the very reign of sin, and of idiotism.'

He is troubled by difficulties respecting God's goverance of this world, and finds his faith shaky. The fact that he communicates this to his father seems a proof that they had got back a considerable degree of intimacy.

> 'I believe (he writes) that you, as well as I, are in this same condition, are you not, father? Neither of us *can* believe, read what we may of reasoning or of proof; and I tell you also frankly that the more I investigate and reason over the Bible . . . the more difficulties I find and the less ground of belief; and this I say after six years of very patient work of this kind. . . . Now this is very painful, especially so, it seems to me, in a time like the present, full of threatening, and in which wickedness is so often victorious and unpunished.'

At some time during August or September Ruskin went

to Paris for two days. The Provisional Government was busy drawing up its new constitution; but, ominously, Louis Napoleon had been returned as a member of the National Assembly. The city still showed deep scars.

> 'Paris (Ruskin writes to his father) had always a black, rent and patched, vicious and rotten look about its ghastly faubourgs. But to see, as now is seen, all this gloom without the meanest effort at the forced gaiety which once disguised it, deepened by all the open evidences of increasing – universal – and hopeless suffering; and scarred by the unhappy traces of a slaughterous and dishonourable contest, is about as deep and painful a lesson – for those who will receive it – as ever was read by vice in ruin.'

Ruskin, however, was to live to read the lesson in a different sense.

§ 3

When they came back from France Ruskin and Euphemia established themselves at No. 31, Park Street (off Grosvenor Square). There must have been something fascinating about both of them. Effie was pretty rather than beautiful, a slight, elegant creature with one of those refined, resolute oval faces that go with a feminine and tenacious character. She dressed noticeably well, and had a fine taste in jewellery, two tastes which they were rich enough to indulge. She seems to have been young and unawakened, and the bleakness of her marriage seems not to have depressed her in the least at this time, as long, that is, as she was not too much alone with Ruskin but had plenty of parties to go to.

For one thing, to a nature such as Effie showed proof of possessing in later life, Ruskin's fame and popularity must

have been a very real compensation for more commonplace happiness. For Ruskin was already famous as well as rich, and Effie was something of a snob. Perhaps, however, she may even have been fond of Ruskin; he was attractive to a great many people. 'He was a tall, slight fellow,' writes a man who first met him that winter, 'whose piercing, frank blue eyes looked through you and drew you to him'; his skin was fair and his hair light and rough, and his nicely clipped whiskers were reddish. His usual dress was a dark blue frock-coat with velvet collar, bright blue stock and black trousers. The lip which 'Lion' had bitten when he was little still stuck out a little and is noticed by this observer. 'But,' he adds, 'you ceased to notice this as soon as he began to talk. I never met any man whose charm of manner at all approached Ruskin's.'

They went to a great many dinners and parties that year – between Effie's love of going out and his own eligibility as an author, it would have been difficult for Ruskin to avoid it. There is an account of one such evening which is perhaps characteristic enough to be recalled.

Effie and Ruskin have been invited to dine with a Mr. George to meet Jenny Lind. Ruskin is surprised to find her so plain, though, as he says, 'she has a most sweet and ladylike manner.' She is severe about the French, saying that 'they seem a nation shut out from God's blessing, and deservedly so.' Ruskin is kinder, and says they lack only a good government and true religion. But after dinner there is an improvement on this exchange of remarks. She sits down to the piano and sings first what Ruskin calls, 'Far Away Bits of Swedish Song,' and then Bellini's *Qui la Voce*. This she sings 'very gloriously, prolonging the low notes exactly like soft wind among trees . . . the lowest were heard dying away as if in extreme distance for at least half a minute. . . . It was in sound exactly what the last rose of Alpine sunset is in colour.'

Ruskin is so charmed that he has determined to lay at her feet the greatest honour and pleasure he could imagine. He has made up his mind to ask her to come to Denmark Hill and see the Turners. However, he does not get a chance. She slips away, and he and Effie are due at a party at Dean Milman's, where he will meet Lord Lansdowne.

But next morning, telling his mother about his evening, how glad he is to think that he did not get that talk with Jenny Lind! For he finds that it would never have done to have her to see his Turners (still, the reader will notice, at his parents' house). 'My mother seemed to look on her as just an ordinary actress, so it was just as well I did not.'

CHAPTER XI

1848–1849: Aged 29–30

'SEVEN LAMPS'

§ 1

THE *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, the book which he was busy writing between the November of 1848 and the April of 1849, is one that the modern reader will perhaps least care to revive of anything that Ruskin wrote. The narrow and impertinent theology of the second volume of *Modern Painters* is here repeated and intensified. But the uneasiness that we shall probably feel in reading it to-day was to a great extent shared by its author when he re-read it in old age. In the notes to *Seven Lamps* in the Library Edition, Cook and Wedderburn say that this was the book that Ruskin later seemed to like least of all his productions, allowing it, for instance, to remain out of print for twenty-five years. About 1870 Mr. George Allen, his publisher, wanted him to revise it with a view to re-issue. Ruskin grew very depressed on re-reading it and expressed himself not without violence. 'The utterly useless twaddle of it, the shallow piety and sonorous talk, are revolting to me.'

Certainly *Seven Lamps* seems an oddly bad book. It consists of a series of seven chapters which, nominally about Gothic architecture, are really about that best of all subjects, the good life and how to live it. But the book falls between two stools: it is neither a philosophic work on art in relation

to morals, nor is it a simple guide to this and that cathedral and a technical criticism of this or that type of moulding, boss or 'curvetto.' The fact is that Ruskin was not in a position at this time to write a philosophic book on art and morals – in the first place because he had read little if any philosophy, in the second place because, in spite of that letter to his father, when it came to open statement, he still held fast to the narrow and dogmatic religion which was taught him by his mother.

How fatal an impediment to any sort of free inquiry is an 'Evangelical' preconception is amply proved in this volume.

The other sort of book, the simple guide-book, Ruskin might have written extremely well, for he worked very hard in gathering his materials. But we shall always find a kind of air-balloon quality about him that made it impossible for him to refrain from moral conclusions. In *Seven Lamps* we find him committing himself to a number of very extraordinary statements, as for instance the following:

> 'A man's sense and conscience, aided by revelation, are always enough if earnestly directed to enable him to discover what is right.'

He has constant resort to Divine Scripture. If he is sensible for a moment, then he is dull, while his peevish, ineffectual way of setting himself against the racing current of his age would be pathetic if it were not so tiresome. He classes together 'a wasps' nest, a rat-hole, or a railway-station,' and has in this book nothing but shrilly indignant abuse for the great, if tragic, new age. Ruskin can see nothing but the noise and fume of the new machinery, and the idea that steel wheels may one day do the work of slave and helot, never crosses his mind.

In *Seven Lamps*, too, is first fully stated the typically Ruskinian 'law' that a building must always tell the truth

about its structure. Those who care about architecture will find this contention fully dealt with by Mr. Geoffrey Scott in his admirable book, *The Architecture of Humanism*, where Ruskin's favourite theme of 'pure periods' is also amusingly discussed.[1]

However, for all its general dreariness, *Seven Lamps* is after all by Ruskin, and so the reader is bound to be refreshed now and then by an aphorism or by a beautiful piece of description.

'Money will not buy life,' he says, or suddenly (*à propos* of nothing in particular) describes a valley in the Jura mountains, in a passage in which his prose passes from music, almost into fragrance and fresh air.

Ruskin was thirty when he wrote *Seven Lamps*. His mind is vigorous, but it is still in leading-strings. When he talks about art he sees well enough that application and skill are needed to perceive the highest truth; yet when he discusses morals, he still supposes that it is perfectly easy to tell what is right and what is wrong. Directly, therefore, his argument takes him out on to the Tom Tiddler's ground of morals, the shackle of his religious education makes him not merely limp, but drags him round in circles with its weight. We are, in short, reminded all through this treatise on architecture of nothing so much as that Ruskin was taught the Christian religion by a woman who was stupid, forcible and intolerant, and that as a man of thirty he had by no means broken away from her.

§ 2

Ruskin had written *Seven Lamps* in five months, and the work had tired him. His usual reaction to fatigue or unhappiness was, as has been seen, to go abroad. Euphemia declaring herself 'unequal to the fatigue of foreign travel',

[1] See also a short discussion in Appendix B of the present volume.

she went off to her parents in Scotland, while her husband went with his to Switzerland.

> 'Poor Mary was with us no more (Ruskin writes in *Præterita*, breaking silence about the period now that Effie is safely away). She got married, as girls always will – the foolish creatures. . . . She heartily loved her uncle and aunt and was sorry to leave them, yet she must needs marry her brother-in-law, a good quiet London solicitor, and was now deep in household cares in a dull street Pimlico way.'

Accounts of the reception of *Seven Lamps* followed the Ruskins abroad. The book was said to have made a great sensation. The *Spectator*, the *New York Tribune*, the *Daily News*, the *Morning Post*, united in its praises. *John Bull* was particularly impressed. Much as they had admired the elevating tone of *Modern Painters*, *Seven Lamps* seemed even better. 'The view of the whole subject is altogether larger and more lofty, and its exalted tone is sustained throughout, sounding like a hymn to architectural loveliness.' But *Blackwood's* scented something odd about it. Why did Mr. Ruskin 'break loose' in so strange a manner as to test architecture by its influence on the life of the workman? *Blackwood's* was right. The seed of disruption lay in the book, no bigger than a grain of mustard, with scarcely more substance than thistledown. 'It is not enough,' Ruskin had written, 'to find men absolute subsistence; we should think of the manner of life which our demands necessitate.' *Blackwood's Magazine* had on its staff a man with a fine nose for heresy.

§ 3

And now, as they travelled, Ruskin had a new book in his head. It was to be on the reaction of society upon art. Ruskin's point was that political and domestic morality

produced good art, and he was at this period quite sure in his own mind what political morality was. He quite properly chose architecture as his instance – it is the most clearly civic of the arts – and he felt sure at this time that his thesis could be proved by the history of French, Florentine, Greek, or any other style of architecture. But he thought it would be convenient to illustrate it from the architecture of Venice. Mr. Collingwood has given a compendious account of his train of thought, and of what came of the enterprise.

> 'The architecture of Venice . . . presented a conveniently isolated school, neatly continuous, with none of those breaks and catastrophes which destroy the full value, as specimens of development, of most other schools. . . . Venice was a perfectly normal development under favourable circumstances. . . . By its example, the lessons of national virtue which . . . the author had felt called on to preach, could be illustrated and enforced in a far more interesting way than if he had merely written a volume of essays on political morality – at least so he felt and intended. But in the end the inquiry branched out into so many directions that the main purpose was all but hidden in flowers of rhetoric, and foliage of technical detail, which most readers took for the sum and substance of its teaching.

Ruskin, with this in mind (the embryo became the three-volume *Stones of Venice*), did not take a holiday when he got to Switzerland, but made copious notes at Zermatt or at Chamouni, not for the new book, but for the third and fourth volumes of *Modern Painters* – the book after next. Here for the first time he checked the accuracy of his drawings by the use of photography,

> 'George indefatigably carrying his little daguerrotype box up everywhere, and taking the first image of the

Matterhorn, as also of the aiguilles of Chamouni, ever drawn by the sun. A thing to be proud of still, though he is now a justice of peace, somewhere in Australia.'

There are several entries in his diary of this time, which point to the awakening of an instinct of what Cook calls 'political revolt' in Ruskin's mind. We find him, for instance, making a pilgrimage to Les Charmettes, once the home of Rousseau.

There is an entry in the diary he kept at this time, which is sufficiently curious from another point of view:

'I walked up this afternoon to Blonay, very happy, and yet full of some sad thoughts; how perhaps I should not be again among these lovely scenes, as I was now, and had ever been, a youth with his parents – it seemed that the sunset of to-day sunk upon me like the departure of youth. First I had a hot march among the vines, and between their dead stone walls; once or twice I flagged a little, and began to think it tiresome; then put my *mind* into the scene, instead of suffering the body only to make report of it; and looked at it with the possession-taking grasp of the imagination – the true one; it gilded all the dead walls, and I felt a charm in every vine tendril that hung over them. It required an effort to maintain the feeling; it was poetry while it lasted, and I felt that it was only while under it that one could draw, or invent, or give glory to, any part of such a landscape. I repeated "I am in *Switzerland*" over and over again, till the name brought back the true group of associations, and I felt I had a soul, like my boy's soul, once again. The whole scene without [this grasp] was but sticks and stones and steep dusty road.'

In these later tours with his parents Ruskin had, as on

his tour alone, his own separate carriage – 'a little brougham, like those the hunting doctors use in *Punch*.' The whole party stayed for a month in the mountains, and after that his parents went back to Geneva, while Ruskin was permitted to have another month to pursue his studies. He seems greatly to have enjoyed his independence.

He writes diplomatically to his father, that he is 'busy as an ant,' and he tries to get his leave of absence extended. He is getting on so well, he says, and would like if possible to spend a couple of days more at the bases of the Chamouni Aiguilles. 'My month,' he reminds his parents, 'from the time I left you at St. Martin's is only up this day three weeks, so I hope it will do if I am with you at Geneva on the 27th.' The extension was granted with some demur.

Yet even so the time came when he must rejoin his parents at Geneva and go back to his wife in London. But the new book meant Venice, so he deposited his parents, and the material which he had collected for *Modern Painters*, in London, picked up his wife, and a fortnight later started off with her to spend the winter in Venice, to write his architectural-political treatise.

CHAPTER XII

1849–1851: Aged 30–32

'STONES OF VENICE'

§ 1

In November, 1849, then (Ruskin having shown Euphemia Chamouni on the way), the couple established themselves in Venice at the Hotel Danieli and stayed there till March. Ruskin as usual worked very hard. He had begun to read Venetian history in the carriage on the way out, so that when he got to Venice he was ready to read in the archives. But unfortunately he found that none of his authorities could agree about the chronology of most of the important buildings. He could soon see that it was going to be as difficult for him to find historical foundations for a treatise on Venetian architecture as it had been for the founders of the city to get them for the buildings themselves. Everywhere there were shifting sands. Ruskin, therefore, disappointed by the records, but with no real training for archæological work, threw himself into a gallant but rather muddled study of the buildings themselves.

Venice was at this time in many ways very unlike the Venice of to-day. It was a shabby place, with a life of its own. With twice the reality even under the Austrians that it has now under the rule of Mussolini and the tourist, it was also in a state of incredible disrepair, while if any restoration of the crumbling palazzi did chance to be

attempted, the new work was patched on to the old with an indifference that would have delighted Marinetti.

All the hours of daylight Ruskin spent out of doors, in this architectural Fritto Misto, measuring, examining, and making accurate drawings. The evenings he spent entering up his memoranda and impressions in larger notebooks. He seems to have been very methodical, and, realizing before the work was far forward how bulky it was going to be, he arranged cross-references and indices. His industry and powers of work were in fact prodigious. He made four or five times as many drawings, for instance, as he afterwards published, while his literary executors found nearly two hundred sheets, dating from this period, covered with careful diagrams and sketches of architectural details.

Ruskin often had to study decorative details close at hand, and as all the palaces were let out in flats, this was often a long business. For instance, Ruskin commissioned his valet-de-place to get permission for him to draw certain windows at the Palazzo Bernardo. Count Bernardo was delighted, but proved now only to be the owner of one flat in his palace – and that flat proved not to be lit by any of the windows that Ruskin wanted to draw. So Ruskin's polite visit was vain, and the process had to begun all over again and permission obtained from the lodger above.

On another occasion, having run to earth the only man, as he had been told, who knew anything about the library of the ducal palace – Ruskin asked this authority if the windows, which now had no tracery, ever had had any. No, said the Italian, there was not the slightest ground for supposing that the windows were ever any different: there was no tracery, there never had been any tracery. Ruskin, noticing that the windows needed ladders to get up to them, wondered whether anybody had ever taken the trouble to look. He went again when Authority was not there, managed to scramble up by means of the library steps, and

found that every single window had, as he had expected, once been filled with tracery.

But the historical records were the worst. 'Most of the accounts agreed,' he writes sadly to his father, 'only in proving that the top was built before the bottom.'

That winter the weather was cold, and such work undertaken single-handed by an untrained man was disheartening. Ruskin confessed in a letter to Rogers that he felt out of health and out of heart.

> 'Fighting with frosty winds at every turn of the canals takes away all the old feelings of peace and stillness; the protracted cold makes the dash of the water on the walls a sound of simple discomfort, and some wild and dark day in February one starts to find oneself actually balancing in one's mind the relative advantages of land and water carriage, comparing the Canal with Piccadilly, and even hesitating whether for the rest of one's life one would rather have a gondola within call or a hansom.'

His fingers would get frost-numbed and his throat chilled while he drew window-sills in the wintry air. Then he would find that window-sills did not agree with the door-steps, or the backs of the houses with the fronts. 'The gondoliers were always wanting to go home,' he wrote to his American friend Professor C. E. Norton. 'They thought it stupid to be tied to a post in the Grand Canal all day long, and disagreeable to have to row to Lido afterwards.' His cook was always trying to catch lobsters on the door-step, and never got any; his valet-de-place was always taking him to see nothing, and waiting by appointment at the wrong place. He caught George smoking on St. Mark's Place (apparently a very dreadful thing and the beginning of all debaucheries); and he had a tame fish which splashed water all over his room and spoilt his drawings.

It is difficult to discover what Euphemia did all this time. She certainly went to parties, and was something of a social success, but what about the morning? On the whole, however, it is clear that the winter was disagreeable. At last duty, as John Ruskin saw it, called him back. His parents had gone back to England in September: his father had not been well, and the daily letters from home reported no improvement. His mother's eyes, too, were beginning to give her trouble – in consequence of the fine needlework which she had learned at the academy for young ladies in Croydon. In short, his parents missed him. Ruskin began to feel that he could not stay away from them any longer, in order to pursue what he felt to be his own selfish ends.

So in February, 1850, John and Euphemia went back to a house of their own at Herne Hill, next door to the one in which Ruskin had been brought up, and not far from his parents at Denmark Hill. Here Ruskin settled down to write the first volume of his Venetian book and to prepare the portfolio of large lithographs and engravings which was to go with it.

§ 2

'Mr. Ruskin,' says Mr. Collingwood, 'living in London this year, and already one of the most important literary celebrities, could not avoid entertaining society, and being entertained, even on the plea of book-writing.' Probably Ruskin was really a little bored – perhaps by the quality of the social life that was offered him, rather than its quantity.

He writes his mother a description of a tiresome party which could hardly be bettered.

> 'Horrible party last night – stiff – large – dull – fidgety – strange – run-against everybody – know-nobody sort of party. Naval people. Young lady claims acquaint-

ance with me. I know as much of her as Queen Pomare. Talk. Get away as soon as I can – ask who she is – Lady Charlotte Elliott – as wise as I was before. Introduced to a black man with chin in collar. Black man condescending. I abuse several things to black man, chiefly the House of Lords. Black man says he lives in it – asks where I live – I don't want to tell him – obliged. Go away and ask who black man is. Mr. Shaw Lefevre – as wise as I was before. Introduced to a young lady – young lady asks if I like drawing – go away and ask who she is – Lady Something Conyngham. Keep away with back to the wall and look at watch. Get away at last – very sulky this morning – Hope my father's better – dearest love to you both – Ever, my dearest mother, your most affec. son.'

Probably Euphemia was far from wishing to avoid entertaining and being entertained; but her wishes as to this, or anything else, is a subject on which neither of her first husband's biographers seem to have taken the mildest interest. Their social life sounds rather solid for a young man of thirty-two and a girl in her twenties. Ruskin is said to have mixed with three distinct circles – an artistic circle, including men both in and out of the Academy; a literary circle of the 'gentleman-author' type, such as gathered round Rogers; and lastly a religious circle. He was friendly with some of the more pronounced Evangelicals like Spurgeon, but knew also 'some of the most evasive' of the early broad-churchmen (the gibe is Mr. Collingwood's). Ruskin would still have nothing to do with Puseyites and Roman Catholics: one of his solaces in reading Venetian history had been to find that Venice, in what he considered her great epoch, had been markedly anti-Papal.

It was typical of Ruskin that he should feel uneasiness at the very divided aims of the professing Christians among

whom he mixed, and typical, too, of his faults and virtues that he should at once take action about it. Schism, he found, was abroad – the Thirty-nine Articles were being discussed with acrimony. They were all pulling different ways – all the energy that might have made headway against Popery and infidelity was spent on internecine conflict. There should be one flock and one fold, with room for all. He felt sure that if people could only go candidly to the New Testament, 'with its simple teaching,' all these differences could be dropped. Lives and thoughts should be simpler: then, among other things, a revival of the right spirit in Art would be produced.

So with his inevitable faith in his own mission, and (it must be added) his unfailing public spirit, Ruskin wrote a pamphlet called *Notes on the Construction of Sheep-Folds*. It created a good deal of stir, and he received shoals of letters from sympathizing readers, who praised his ends and criticized his means. The pamphlet is said, owing to its name, to have been occasionally bought by Border farmers, who were naturally disappointed with its contents.

In March, 1851, the first volume of *Stones of Venice* appeared, and was on the whole well received by the newspapers. To say, as does one biographer, that the reviewers were 'overcome by ecstasies of rapture,' seems a somewhat extreme description of the respectful and kindly view they seem to have taken of it. However, it did not sell nearly as well either as *Seven Lamps* or the two volumes of *Modern Painters*. This was disturbing. It was not a matter of the times being unfavourable: there was no distraction, as in the case of *Seven Lamps*. People's attention, in England at any rate, was particularly directed to the arts in relation to the life of nations, for it was the year of the Great Exhibition. One pamphleteer, indeed (one of the few beside the buying public who did not like the book), objected to it on the ground that Ruskin had not mentioned either Prince

Albert or his double scheme for promoting cultural internationalism and the civilization of industrial processes.

However neither it, nor the large folio of architectural drawings intended as its companion, met with much success. These plates had been extremely laborious and expensive to produce, and a great deal of money was lost over them, much to James Ruskin's distress.

§ 3

As is often the case when a book does not sell, the fault lay not with the public, but with the author. Ruskin had not recaptured the charm of the first volume of *Modern Painters*, but had produced a volume which was on the whole dull, prejudiced, and arrogant. Its dullness was to some extent unavoidable. Ruskin had to convey a great deal of information to readers ignorant alike of architecture and Venetian history before he could build up the critical superstructure which he meant to rear in the next volumes. Indeed, he calls this volume 'The Foundations,' and it has many of the characteristics of a substructure. It is the foundation, however, of a definitely planned building. With all its demerits, *The Stones of Venice* does contain an enormous amount of information and observation, and finally the three volumes make a coherent whole.

The book is prejudiced in the strict sense, because Ruskin was quite sure before he set out on his examination of the history of Venice what he was going to find there.

What, then, was the bias with which he started? He had no objection to autocracy, and little to fighting, of whose consequences his sheltered life had prevented him knowing anything. He liked Gothic, and disliked Palladian, architecture. He seems to have had no particular objection to fanaticism, and the reader who has followed his psychological history so far will probably agree that such a man

as Ruskin was bound to have a very great dislike for the easy happiness of Paganism and the Renaissance. For, if these people were right, and there was indeed no harm in coming to terms with the world, if there should turn out to be every good in music, wine, and the love of women, then all the repression and the hard asceticism of his childhood and upbringing had been no good. It would never do for Ruskin to suppose for a moment with eighteenth-century cynics that there was no particular point in honouring your father and mother, or in making Sunday a day of detestable gloom. To admit that the moral or physical hardships which they happen to have undergone may have been, after all, quite unnecessary, is a task from which a surprising number of people shrink.

When Ruskin condemned the Renaissance his life had been one long sacrifice to the Protestant and angular virtues, and to an acknowledgment of irreconcilable difference between Right and Wrong.

He had not only lost the one woman with whom he had been passionately in love, but several other girls with whom he felt he could have contented himself. Beyond this he had made the supreme sacrifice of tying himself up (for life, he probably thought) to a woman for whom he did not care at all. Her lack of charm condemned him, in fact, to celibacy, for his marriage, though now in its second year, was still only a marriage in name. Could an irascible, sensitive, moralizing man like Ruskin, who was so situated, do other than condemn – pediment, column and bas-relief – the whole 'foul torrent of the Renaissance' which managed these things so much better?

If this volume, and parts of the two that followed it, are both angry and agitated, we must remember that Ruskin was clinging to the gods of his fathers, and facing the enemy in a fight which he never could quite bring to a finish.

But to suggest such motives is not, of course, to suppose

that Ruskin thought that he was projecting the shadow of his own miserable situation upon the lagoons of Venice. When he wrote against the 'Greek fret' or the approach to St. Peter's, he was genuinely sure that he was writing about architecture. But the fact is that part of the charm, and indeed the 'kick,' of Ruskin's work lies in the fact that he expresses very deep layers of feeling even when the ostensible subject is trivial. In the language of modern psychology, Ruskin in an unusual degree expressed his unconscious self in his writing; in older and more accepted phraseology, he was 'inspired.'

One more outside influence helped to sway Ruskin in his judgment of architecture. This time the influence was, however, later recognized by Ruskin himself. As has happened with a great many people since Ruskin's day, his doubt as to the fairness of the economic system under which he prospered financially, brought other doubts in its train; and because he approved of what he believed about the mediæval system, he approved of the æsthetic qualities of mediæval work. But to cite this is to anticipate, for when he wrote the first volume of *The Stones of Venice* his economic doubt was a cloud no bigger than a man's hand. Ruskin was still sure that, like 'the blessed Glendivere' –

> ''Tis mine to speak and yours to hear.'

The adulation with which *Seven Lamps* had been received had made him feel that there was no need to make concessions to his public. Like all writers who have made a success and who have been courted, he could not help getting the impression that the public was sure to like whatever he wrote.

Fortunately for Volumes II and III, this proved not to be the case, and we find Ruskin writing in a chastened mood to his father, to say that he really will have to be more popular in the next volume.

CHAPTER XIII

1851: Aged 32

THE PRE-RAPHAELITES

'L'unité de l'art chrétien au moyen âge; des bords de la Somme au rives de l'Arno, nul ne l'a sentê comme lui, et il a réalisé dans nos cœurs le rêve de grands Papes du moyen âge: "l'Europe chrétienne". Si, comme on l'a dit, son nom doit rester attaché au preraphaëlism, on devrait entendre par là, non celui d'après Turner, mais celui d'avant Raphaël. Nous pouvons oublier aujourd'hui les services qu'il a rendu à Hunt, à Rossetti, à Millais; mais ce qu'il a fait pour Giotto, pour Carpaccio, pour Bellini, nous le pouvons pas. Son œuvre divine ne fut pas de susciter les vivants, mais de resusciter les morts.'

Marcel Proust

§ 1

March, 1851, saw the publication of the first volume of *Stones of Venice*. Ruskin remained in London, except for a short holiday, till the end of the summer, and was there when the Academy opened. There were no Turners that year, and Ruskin found that there were few pictures from which he could derive much pleasure.

But the year before, there had been a picture of Christ in the carpenter's shop, by a young man whose name appeared to be Millais, and Ruskin had noticed that it was painted in a very odd manner. William Dicey, an eminent R.A., had dragged him back to this pale stiff composition, and had forced him to look for its merits. But though Ruskin had been obliged to agree that it had character, he had not very much cared about it, nor about a picture by somebody with the Italian name of Rossetti; nor for a picture of an early Christian missionary, signed W. H. Hunt, a

young man who did not appear to be any relation of his old friend Hunt of the Water-colour Society.

In 1851 these same young men were again exhibiting. There was a picture of a girl by Millais, called *Mariana*. There was a picture by Hunt of a wood with figures, called *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and two canvases by Millais called *The Return of the Dove to the Ark* and *The Woodman's Daughter*. But on this first day of the Academy Ruskin did not pay any particular attention to them. Next morning he opened his newspaper to see what *The Times* had to say. *The Times* critic, true to type, was shocked by the pre-Raphaelites, exactly as he had been shocked by Turner.

> 'These young artists,' he wrote, 'have unfortunately become notorious by addicting themselves to an antiquated style and an affected simplicity in painting. . . . We can extend no toleration to a mere servile imitation of the cramped style, false perspective, and crude colour of remote antiquity. We want not to see what Fuseli termed drapery "snapped instead of folded," faces bloated into apoplexy, or extenuated to skeletons; colour borrowed from the jars in a druggist's shop, and expression forced into caricature. . . . That morbid infatuation which sacrifices truth, beauty, and genuine feeling, to mere eccentricity, deserves no quarter at the hands of the public.'

Ruskin folded his newspaper, shrugged his shoulders, and began to rearrange his minerals.

§ 2

Let us at this juncture leave the Ruskins for the moment to stay quietly in their house at Park Street, while we consider the history and character of some of these young painters. They are worth considering, for John Ruskin was

later to defend and expound their work, while one of them was destined to make up to Effie for the six years of her first marriage.

John Everett Millais in 1851 was a handsome, tall, thin young man, full of life and energy. He had the self-confidence of the infant prodigy who has fulfilled all the hopes of his family and teachers. As early as nine years old he had taken up painting as his profession, and had, at that age, been awarded a medal by the Society of Arts. When it was time for him to come up and receive it at the hands of a Royal Highness, the prizeman was so small as to be invisible behind the desk at which Royalty was sitting. Millais was finally stood upon a stool to receive this, the first of many public honours.

By the time he was thirteen this boy was still working steadily and was already a regular Academy student, which meant that he worked with grown men.

His family was poor but genteel, and we learn that his mother took great pains with his clothes.[1]

A fellow-student recalls his surprise, when entering the antique school as a probationer, at finding among the regular students a little boy not five feet two inches high, in a white collar with a goffered edge, and a pretty jacket gathered at the waist with a cloth belt. But this child with long curling hair was already a senior student and was merely condescending to work in the antique school.

Millais ended his student career by making friends with an unsuccessful student named Holman Hunt, and by winning the Academy's gold medal.

It was when he was nineteen and had fed full on public approbation that Millais and his friend Hunt turned deliberately from 'The Grand Style' and the 'Laws of Composition.'

Exactly how, when, or by whom, the famous Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was founded, is a matter of con-

[1] *Life of John Everett Millais,* by John G. Millais.

troversy with which a biographer of Ruskin is not concerned. It is enough to say that, by 1851, Millais, Holman Hunt, Rossetti, and a few other young painters, had formed a vague association for mutual society and help, and that they called this society the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. They were pledged always to tell the truth in their pictures, and to paint from nature with the greatest possible fidelity.

They signed their productions with the initials P.R.B., and were all very young, earnest and religious, and mostly rather capable. They began to exhibit their defiant productions. The critics immediately took up the challenge, and abused them with the boisterous violence which makes nineteenth-century controversy so entertaining. When the public disliked their pictures (as the experimenters had really intended), and when the critics began to explain their peculiar vileness, it was naturally Millais, a young man haughtily used to success, who was most shocked and indignant.

After the attack in *The Times* the idea occurred to him that it might be possible to enlist Ruskin in their defence. Millais himself was not particularly a Ruskinite. But his 'brother,' Holman Hunt, was a devotee who declared that a celebrated passage seemed to have been written expressly for him.

> 'Go to Nature (Ruskin had advised the student) in all singleness of heart, and walk with her laboriously and trustingly, having no other thoughts but how best to penetrate her meaning, and remember her instruction; rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing; believing all things to be right and good, and rejoicing always in the truth.'

All this the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood had done. Now let their adviser stand by them when they were attacked.

§ 3

'Millais,' Coventry Patmore relates, 'came to me in great agitation and anger, and begged me to ask Ruskin to take the matter up. I went at once to Ruskin, and the next day (after Ruskin had been back to the Academy and had a good look at the pictures) there appeared in *The Times* a letter of great length and amazing quality, considering how short a time Ruskin had to examine the picture and make up his mind about it.'

Ruskin took the line of upbraiding *The Times* critic. These pictures ought to have been treated seriously, if only on account of the mere labour bestowed on them, and 'their fidelity to a certain order of truth.' The young artists were, besides, at a critical period of their career: they might either sink into nothingness or rise to real greatness. Certainly, when he himself had seen a picture by Millais the previous year, he had nearly come to the same conclusion as *The Times* critic; but he had not been so hasty as to express such views, nor was he any more willing now to condemn, though he had 'very imperfect sympathy with these artists,' especially with their Romanist and Tractarian leanings.

But as for *The Times* critic saying, as he had, that they sacrificed truth, as well as feeling, to eccentricity, that was mere nonsense. 'Their fidelity to nature is extraordinary, and they do not desire nor pretend to imitate antique painting.' He thinks it a pity that they have chosen the *nom-de-guerre* of 'Pre-Raphaelite,' for, after all, they have only tried to go back to 'archaic honesty,' and reproduce the actual facts of the scene, 'irrespective of any conventional rules of picture-making.' 'There has been nothing in art so earnest or so complete as these pictures since the days of Albert Dürer.'

But Ruskin was not content with writing this handsome letter, but at once enlisted his father's sympathy. James

Ruskin immediately offered to buy Millais's *The Return of the Dove*; and started negotiations for a purchaser for Holman Hunt's *Valentine*. Hunt, indeed, was so poor at this time that he could not find a penny for a stamp; and James's was the help that was most needed by all the Brothers.

Millais, whose idea the appeal to Ruskin had been, was triumphant at its success, and his letters speak in glee of the promptness and vigour of their champion.

> [1] 'No doubt you have seen the violent abuse of my pictures in *The Times*. . . . But in spite of their denouncing my pictures as unworthy to hang on any walls, the famous critic, Mr. Ruskin, has written offering to purchase *The Dove*.'

Millais and Holman Hunt at once sent Ruskin a joint letter of thanks, and assured him that they were neither Tractarians nor Puseyites, as he had feared. Next day Ruskin and Effie ordered out the carriage, and drove in state to the house in Gower Street where Millais and Holman Hunt shared a studio. At last, after what seems to have been a most agreeable encounter, they carried Millais off to their house. There he stayed with them for a week.

Millais, who had, as we have seen, lived in public since he was nine, was interested in people, and was besides a most amusing and impulsive talker. He soon broke down what there was of northern awkwardness and stiffness in the Ruskins, and they were soon all three on the pleasantest terms.

Millais's pride was soothed by this immediate success with the great man, and he felt that he had done the Brotherhood the best possible turn. He almost boasts of the acquaintance.

> [2] Ruskin and I are such good friends,' he writes, 'that he wishes me to accompany him to Switzerland this

[1] *Life of John Everett Millais*, by John G. Millais. [2] *Ibid.*

summer. . . . We are as yet singularly at variance in our opinions upon Art. . . . One of our differences is about Turner; he believes that I shall be converted on further acquaintance with his works, and I that he will gradually slacken in his admiration.'

At the end of May Ruskin wrote again to *The Times*, for the abuse of the Pre-Raphaelite pictures had not ceased in the rest of the Press. But Millais's charming talk had not talked him round; there is blame mixed with his praise. Why, he asks, will the Pre-Raphaelites choose such hideous people to paint? There is a truly 'painful commonness of features in many of the principal figures in many of their pictures' – for instance in Mr. Hunt's *Valentine defending Sylvia*. While the girl in Millais's *Dove* is worse. How could a painter of sensibility choose a type so far inferior to average humanity? As for her expression, it expresses nothing save dullness and complacency.

However, he goes on to praise the 'tender and beautiful stooping figure, the intense harmony of colour, and the ruffled plumage of the weary dove,' while the hay is said to be 'painted not only elaborately, but with the most perfect ease of touch, and mastery of effect.'

The present reader may think that, with the hay so much praised, and the maiden so much blamed, a very moderate tone has been achieved, but his opinion proved far too favourable for *The Times*, which adds a catty editorial. Though they would find it a difficult task 'to destroy the web which the paradoxical ingenuity of our correspondent, the author of *Modern Painters*, has spun,' yet they wish to point out that they had been severe with these painters, in order to induce them, if possible, to relinquish 'what is absurd, morbid and offensive in their works,' and to cultivate 'whatever higher and better qualities they possess.' Their pictures ('these unfortunate attempts,' *The Times* prefers to call

them) have, however, now probably answered their purpose 'by attaining for these young gentlemen a notoriety less hard to bear – even in the shape of ridicule – than public indifference.'

Meanwhile, Ruskin was preparing a pamphlet on Pre-Raphaelism. He further slipped an allusion to them into the first volume of *Modern Painters*, whose fifth edition he was preparing for the Press, and in the next volume of *Stones of Venice* he introduced frequent references to Millais, Hunt, and Rossetti.

This pamphlet is a curious piece of writing in several ways, and must have come as a surprise to the young men whom it was intended to defend. For, characteristically, Ruskin wrote far more in it about Turner and the state of snobbery in the year 1851 than about the Brotherhood. At first reading, and perhaps to its contemporaries, the pamphlet must have seemed rather off the subject. The ground it takes as a base seems too wide when the subject is a newspaper controversy about certain Academy pictures. But the pamphlet would be – if he had pressed home the application of the principles which he set out in it – a fine vindication, not of the pictures under discussion, but of the spirit in which they were painted.

It is the spirit of snobbery in England which makes mothers more concerned to maintain their children in a genteel station of life, than with their moral or physical welfare, that also makes the public want sound, regular Academy pictures. If the subject is historical, then, says snobbery, the picture must be 'all lampblack and lightning,' if it is a landscape, then snobbery and correctness asks, not merit, but that the inevitable brown tree should be correctly placed in the foreground. So naturally, he goes on, when two young men like Holman Hunt and Millais want to go direct to nature, when they paint out-of-doors, and cast their shadows as the sun casts his, and not by the rules laid down by Sir

Joshua Reynolds, then they are met with a universal howl of execration – it is the same howl which rewarded Turner for pushing his inquiry into nature's forms and colours beyond the point of moderation and gentlemanly mustiness. All liberal and enlightened opinion, he goes on, in the art world is now reconciled to Turner. Let the newspaper critics of the young Pre-Raphaelites beware – lest here, too, they have to eat their words.

Such is the main argument of the pamphlet. But it contains one curious excursion – a suggestion which throws a good deal of light on Ruskin's ideas at this time, as well as on the aims of the Pre-Raphaelites. The suggestion is that the artist should consider himself as a recorder of the beauties of landscape, of natural forms, and in a less degree of architecture. Ruskin thinks a regular survey from this point of view should be made, first of England, and finally of as much of the world as Ruskin himself could imagine. A painter cannot always, he says, be expected to produce masterpieces, and here is an undertaking which would afford him respectable employment for his off moments, and yet enable him to break out into a masterpiece whenever he was able.

Through this rather naïve suggestion there emerges a very definite feature, both of Ruskin's mind and of that of the Pre-Raphaelites. They were out for facts. It is impossible to over-emphasize the strength of their desire for accuracy, either in finding out the mode of growth of a spray of wild geranium for a foreground, or in drawing fifteenth- or thirteenth-century clothes and armour. It was not until the second stage in the Pre-Raphaelite development that Rossetti and Burne-Jones ran the movement out into mediævalism and romantic Celticism.

At this stage the watchword was truth. It was typical, for instance, that Holman Hunt, who wanted to paint religious subjects, should go to Syria and spend several years in

drawing Syrians, goats, and sand – not because he liked them, but in order that he might give greater accuracy to his painting of Biblical subjects.

§ 4

Ruskin's wife must have found this new interest most agreeable. Ruskin's friends had not, up till now, often been young, and still less often gay. But more than one member of the Brotherhood was handsome, all of them were either merry or else exquisitely romantic, and all of them were young. In a society that had frozen stiff, their habits were Bohemian and their morals were pure. Moreover, they had the abandon and the male helplessness with which Du Maurier's heroes charmed so many virgin hearts. They were careless, they smoked pipes, they shouted and sang songs, in fact, except in their virtue, they were everything that Ruskin was not.

CHAPTER XIV

1851–1853: Aged 32–34

VENICE UNDER THE AUSTRIANS

§ 1

At last this interesting London season came to an end. Parliament rose; Millais and Hunt and the rest set out exuberantly with heavy canvases and easels 'for various midge-haunted streams,' while John and Euphemia Ruskin started again for Venice.

It was, anyhow, a three weeks' journey, and this time they lingered in Switzerland a little. The season had been fun, and Effie was in spirits. They travelled with quite a large party of English people; the weather was pleasant; Ruskin knew all the best inns and where the best posting horses and views were to be found; and altogether the journey was delightful.

Writing home to his father, Ruskin tells how Effie even made the monks at the St. Bernard's Hospice play and sing – not Gregorian chants, but merry and unclerical tunes. At Milan she felt glad to be in Italy again, and that was handsome of her, considering what a poor time Ruskin had given her in Venice the year before. Ruskin was cheerful, too, and from Verona wrote a genuinely self-confident letter to his father.

> 'Miss Edgworth may abuse the word "genius," but there is such a thing, and it consists mainly in a man's doing things because he cannot help it – intellectual things, I

mean. I don't think myself a great genius, but I believe I have genius, something different from mere cleverness.'

The world was to agree with him.

Venice seemed pleasant when they arrived, the weather was good, and, much to Effie's delight, there seemed promise of a regular season. They did not go to Danieli's, but got apartments of their own this time, looking south, and almost opposite Santa Maria de la Salute. Writing to his father, Ruskin seems scarcely to understand how gay Effie is going to be. They are both happy in their plans.

> 'I am now settled more quietly than I have ever been since I was at college, and it will certainly be nobody's fault but my own if I do not write well; besides that, I have St. Mark's Library open to me. . . . I have a lovely view from my windows, and temptation to exercise every day, and excellent food; so I think you may make yourself easy about me . . . for the first time in my life, I feel to be living really in my own house.'

Venice under the Austrians was brilliant that year. The Austrians liked the English; and Effie was particularly popular. The Ruskins are to be seen going to masked balls in honour of the Infanta of Spain or of the Archduke Albert. Effie even has this Archduke to tea.

> 'He came (writes Ruskin) . . . in the quietest English domestic way, or rather in the German way, which is still quieter than the English. . . . He attacked Effie playfully about the Kossuth doings. She pleaded that she was not to answer for them, being Scotch. "Nay," he said, "if Kossuth goes to Glasgow, you will see – he will be received quite as well as he is at Birmingham." . . . She gets on very nicely, Lady Sorel says, with the foreigners, not being stiff or shy like most English.'

Presently the Austrian High Admiral came to Venice for

a launch: it is Effie who is invited to give the signal. Then there were illuminations on the water to receive the young Emperor, Francis Joseph: Ruskin thinks him 'a well-made youth, with rather a thin, ugly, and not unpleasant face.'

In search of such gaieties Effie got Ruskin as far as Verona, where old Marshal Radetsky, the Governor, gave balls and parties. 'We are excessively fêted here,' writes Ruskin. 'Marshal Radetsky sent Effie his picture yesterday with his own signature.' He also lent them his carriage, and three of the young officers came and escorted them on their evening drive in the public gardens. 'The horses were as happy as their masters, but keeping their place beside the carriage to a hair's-breadth.' Ruskin, who could not ride, sat beside Effie in the barouche.

There was no end to the number of English in Venice, and the Ruskins had them all to tea. Sir Gilbert Scott came, and Bishop Wilberforce, and the Prince of Wales's tutor, and Lord Dufferin – this last a peer who convulsed the Venetians by paddling about the lagoons in an indiarubber boat like a bath.

By February the notes for the second volume were well under way, and Ruskin was working well. Effie had the balls and a Marshal to send her his picture (even if he were eighty-seven years old); and Ruskin, besides his other work, found time to write a commentary of ninety pages on the Book of Job. So everybody was happy. Slight religious doubts and a relaxed throat seem to have troubled him now and then. However, he resolved that he would act as if the Bible were true, even if he found a belief in its truth hard to hold. He writes with conscious eloquence about these religious doubts in a letter to Acland.

> 'You speak of the flimsiness of your own faith. Mine, which was never strong, is being beaten into mere gold-leaf, and flutters in weak rags from the letter of its old forms. But the only letters it can hold by at all are the old Evangelical formulæ. If only the geologists

would let me alone I could do very well, but those dreadful hammers! I hear the clink of them at the end of every cadence of the Bible phrases.'

Certainly, when he was in Venice, Ruskin made an effort to live what was considered a Christian life. He and Effie were both in the habit of visiting the poor and sick, both in hospitals and in their own homes. Ruskin, moreover, would often send home the names and addresses of struggling artists and other people whom he wanted to help, on which occasions James Ruskin would give them money. Everybody in Venice knew Ruskin, and he was known to sacristans and the recipients of charity as 'Signor Roveschin.'

What with Lord Dufferin's boat and Roveschin's ladders, the Venetians must have thought the English an odd race. However, fortunately for our national honour, there was the fair and beautiful Signora to dance and wear jewels, and behave as a lady should.

§ 2

But Venetian charities did not go on satisfying Ruskin. Some time in 1851, between the two winters in Venice, Ruskin had again been reading Rousseau. He found it unsettling. In November, 1851, we find him writing to his father that he has been struck by parallel columns in a newspaper.

The first (he tells his father) gave an account of a girl, aged twenty-one, being found, after lying exposed all night, and having given birth to a dead child, on the banks of the canal near Maidstone. . . . The second column was an account of the fashions for November, with an elaborate account of satin skirts; and the third, of the death of a child after burning – because the surgeon, without an order from the parish, would neither go to see it nor send any medicine.

Rousseau and the newspapers were doubly unsettling because Ruskin was at this time breathing a new and strange

air. It was the ultra-dynastic and hierarchical atmosphere of the Austrian ruling class. Such an atmosphere of privilege and complacence was new to him and very different from the mercantile self-help in which he had been brought up.

Soon Ruskin, thus roused by the spectacle of Austrian autocracy and by his perusal of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, wrote three letters to *The Times*. In these he for the first time expressed his views on taxation, the franchise, and education.

These letters have many of the characteristics of Ruskin's later political style, both of thought and of writing. He relies for his effects, as we shall find him relying later on, almost entirely upon *naïveté*. He plants innocent but most efficiently explosive questions.

Political economy in England was just then wrapping itself in a terrible mantle of verbiage. If we could not derive its name of 'the dismal science' from the melancholy conclusions of the *laissez-faire* Manchester School, it would be quite possible to derive it from the style in which political economists expressed themselves.

Such dreariness and verbosity seems a characteristic of new sciences (in our own day we have the example of psychoanalysis). Unless new ideas happen to be expressed by a great stylist as well as a great man, the tangle is often extraordinary at first. It seems as though some communal process of digestion and assimilation has to go on before an idea comes to be expressed with grace and clarity, while the general effect is that of a vicious circle, for the verbal entanglements make the new ideas even more liable to be misunderstood than their newness makes inevitable. Ruskin seems to have had in mind from the first, as one of his objects, the clarification of the subject of political economy, by the application to it of the cool and limpid style of which he understood the secret.

For this reliance on *naïveté*, this blowing away of sacerdotal trappings, is characteristic not only of his economic

writing, but, in patches at least, of all Ruskin's work. In the first volume of *Stones of Venice*, for instance, the reader is led to a study of architecture by being asked to suppose himself to be actually building a simple wall. As this imaginary wall goes up, Ruskin step by step suggests to the reader what difficulties, and what contrivances, will present themselves. Such, too, is his approach to other subjects: he habitually uses the return to nature as his solvent. In these letters to *The Times* we see him, as we shall see him later, asking the reason of what seemed to him unreasonable elements in the politics and economy of the world. Then, having pointed out the evils, without considering how they had arisen or whose interests were involved, we find him demanding immediate reform.

Unfortunately, in this little-known first effort at statesmanship, the theology taught him by his mother comes to trip him up. They are an odd mixture of progress and reaction. In the first of the letters Ruskin makes a simple if breath-taking and Rousseauish plea for a steeply graded income-tax and for a mild form of capital levy (property tax). But almost in the same paragraph he scolds the House of Commons for having passed the Bill removing the civil disabilities of the Jews.

He is shrewd and Radical about the Corn Laws, and sees the introduction of the plea that a repeal of the duty will ruin the farmer, as a red herring.

> 'The farmers (says Ruskin) have nothing whatever to do with it. The landlords are the persons who must eventually suffer (from the abolition of the Corn Laws) if anyone suffers, and the whole question is whether landed property in England is to lose part of its value, or whether that value is to be maintained by making the poor pay more for their bread. Let the question be once reduced to these simple terms, and we know how to deal with it.'

He cannot, now or later, see the point of indirect taxation. Import and export duties seem to him generally absurd.

> 'Why, instead of taking the money simply out of our pockets, should we prefer to have it cunningly filched from us in duties on tea and sugar? . . . All European nations are precisely in this respect acting as rationally as an individual would do, who, disliking (as it is natural for all men to dislike) to pay his rent on quarter-day, should go to his landlord and say, "Sir, it is painful to my feelings to pay my rent in this straightforward and visible manner. If you could conveniently let your steward watch at my house-door and make my cook pay him so much a pound on all the meat that comes into the house, it would be much pleasanter for me, and I would pay the steward for his extra trouble."'

He is 'no Republican,' he goes on, but surely the Government should find some way of taxing the rich. 'It is the duty of every Government to prevent, as far as possible, the unreasonable luxury of the rich, and if it cannot prevent it, to maintain itself by it.' He wants a property tax (capital levy) on fortunes exceeding £10,000, and an income-tax of 10 per cent. on all fortunes over £1,000 a year.

In the next letter, which concerns the franchise, another opinion of Ruskin's comes up. It is an opinion which made some of his contemporaries declare him a Tory, and which later made Bernard Shaw call him a Communist. He does not believe in the franchise, and objects extremely to the election to Parliament of a member who is pledged to express by vote what he believes to be the opinion of the majority of his constituents.

> 'If this is to be the way of it, why should we undergo the agitation of elections at all? It would be wiser and cheaper to make wooden members of Parliament, and work them by electric telegraph from the constituent towns and counties. A member of Parliament ought to be a man chosen because he is wiser than other

> people, in order that with other such chosen men he may deliberate on questions too hard for the body of the people to decide, they not having time or opportunity to examine all their bearings.'

It was surely a moment in the history of England when even the most timid might have made some little excursion into economics; and the notion of writing to *The Times*, and the whole tone of the letters, is very far from being subversive. Yet it is typical of Ruskin that, instead of sending these letters direct to the editor, he should have sent them to his father.

From the point of view of the Ruskin family he was right. They were too much for James Ruskin. Disraeli's principle of 'educating his party' had not gone far enough for the sherry merchant to bear such inquiries. So James Ruskin never sent the letters to *The Times* at all. Ruskin, waiting in Venice in November, writes rather pathetically:

> 'I don't know whether you have found my *Times* letters worth sending, or whether *The Times* will put them in, but I rather hope so – not in the hope of their doing any good at present, but because I want to be able to refer to them in future. . . . I hope *The Times* will put these letters in: for twenty years hence, if I live, I should like to be able to refer to them and say, "I told you so – and now you are beginning to find it out." '

But James would not budge even for this letter. In March Ruskin is sorry to hear from his mother that his father is worrying because they do not agree. Ruskin begs him not to vex himself by supposing that his son is turning Republican.

> 'As for the universal suffrage in my letter, if you look over it carefully, you will see that I am just as far from universal suffrage as you are – and that by my measure one man of parts and rank would out-weigh in voting a whole shoal of the mob.'

Upon this his father writes and explains himself: Ruskin has adopted the safe and respectable calling of an art critic, he has studied art properly; let him stick to it.

> 'I think all attacks on your books are only as the waves beating on Eddystone Lighthouse, whereas your politics are Slum Buildings liable to be knocked down, and no man to whom authority is a useful engine should expose himself to frequent defeat by slender forces.'

Balked, then, of their natural outlet in *The Times*, Ruskin's political thoughts soaked themselves to some extent into the fabric of *Stones of Venice*, so that a book on architecture, which did much to change the physical face of the growing towns of England, also contains a chapter which affected political thought for a generation.

§ 3

It was on December 19, 1851, while the Ruskins were still in Venice, that Turner died, leaving most of his pictures to the nation. Ruskin heard first unofficially, and then officially, that he had been appointed executor. This would mean further contact with the authorities at the National Gallery, with whom he was already in correspondence. He had been trying for some months to persuade the Trustees to let him buy them two Tintorettos, which the Venetians, after their manner, were allowing to decay. Ruskin's later interest in such painters as Carpaccio and Ghirlandajo has obscured, for his readers, his persistent delight in what Mr. Wyndham Lewis calls 'Tintoretto's superb types of Aryan heavy-weight'; and Ruskin's championship of Tintoretto, Titian, Rubens and Paul Veronese ought not to be forgotten.

But the National Gallery seemed not to be interested in the Tintorettos: nothing seemed to be coming of the negotiations, and Ruskin was bitterly disappointed. The correspondence with the Trustees kept the Ruskins in Venice

longer than they had intended; so that, the lease of their Palazzo being ended, they moved into lodgings in St. Mark's Place. Here it was that Effie had some of her jewels stolen under mysterious circumstances. It is said that at one stage of the affair it looked as if Ruskin might have to accept a challenge to fight a duel, but on what grounds, tradition is silent. However, nothing came either of the duel or the Tintorettos.

Finally, it was June before they left Venice, and by then Ruskin had practically completed his notes.

§ 4

They went back, not to Park Street, but to the new house on Herne Hill. It was No. 29, and nearly next door to the old house in which Ruskin had been brought up.

Here for the next eight months (summer, 1852, to winter, 1852) Ruskin was busy writing the second and third volumes of *The Stones of Venice*.

These volumes, which seem to have given their author very much less trouble than the first, will also come much more easily to the reader. It is the beginning of the second volume, indeed, which contains one of Ruskin's most beautiful descriptions, the well-known account of the approach to Venice by gondola. But beautiful, in its smooth, low tone, as is that description, it is not more lovely than several other passages in these two volumes.

Beauty of style, and imagination in approach, were, for example, surely never better used to inform and exhilarate the reader than in this exquisite piece of map-making:

> 'We do not enough conceive for ourselves that variegated mosaic of the world's surface which a bird sees in its migration, that difference between the district of the gentian and of the olive which the stork and the swallow see far off, as they lean upon the sirocco wind. Let us, for a moment, try to raise ourselves even above the level

of their flight, and imagine the Mediterranean lying beneath us like an irregular lake, and all its ancient promontories sleeping in the sun; here and there an angry spot of thunder, a grey stain of storm, moving upon the burning field; and here and there a fixed wreath of white volcano smoke, surrounded by its circle of ashes; but for the most part a great peacefulness of light, Syria and Greece, Italy and Spain, laid like pieces of a golden pavement into the sea-blue; chased, as we stoop nearer to them, with bossy beaten work of mountain chains, and glowing softly with terraced gardens, and flowers heavy with frankincense, mixed among masses of laurel, and orange, and plumy palm, that abate with their grey-green shadows the burning of the marble rocks, and of the ledges of porphyry sloping under lucent sand. Then let us pass farther towards the north, until we see the orient colours change gradually into a vast belt of rainy green, where the pastures of Switzerland, and poplar valleys of France, and dark forests of the Danube and Carpathians stretch from the mouths of the Loire to those of the Volga, seen through clefts in grey swirls of rain-cloud and flaky veils of the mist of the brooks, spreading low along the pasture lands: and then, farther north still, to see the earth heave into mighty masses of leaden rock and heathy moor, bordering with a broad waste of gloomy purple that belt of field and wood, and splintering into irregular and grisly islands amidst the northern seas, beaten by storm, and chilled by ice-drift, and tormented by furious pulses of contending tide, until the roots of the last forests fail from among the hill ravines, and the hunger of the north wind bites their peaks into barrenness; and, at last, the wall of ice, durable like iron, sets, death-like, its white teeth against us out of the polar twilight.'

CHAPTER XV

1853–1854: Aged 34–35

THE SUMMER AT GLENFINLAS

'Notons d'abord pour bien insister sur les traits particulière de la physionomie de Ruskin, que la science et l'art . . . n'était pas distincts à ses yeux.'
Marcel Proust

§ I

Such flights are neither common nor easy, and Ruskin had a right to be tired when he had at last finished. It was decided that he and Effie should go for a long holiday in Scotland, and they accordingly took a cottage at Glenfinlas in the Trossachs.

> 'John Ruskin (wrote Miss Mitford) is in the Highlands with two young friends, the Pre-Raphaelite painter Millais, and his brother, and his own beautiful wife. They are living in a hut on the borders of Loch Achray, playing at cottagers, as rich people like to do.'

It rained incessantly at Glenfinlas for five weeks: Effie had begun by declaring that there was no such delightful climate as that of her native Scotland, but even she could not maintain that the summer of 1853 was perfect. Sketching was generally impossible, and the fine rain, driven along inexhaustibly by the west winds, made it impossible to see anything.[1] Mackintoshes had not yet been invented, and it was impossible for Effie to substitute a really short skirt for her petticoats. However, they all put on plaids, turning out

[1] Millais, *Life and Letters*.

every day in spite of the weather, while the Millais brothers even put on kilts.

They seem to have been an enterprising party. The Millais, for instance, in spite of the weather, were very fond of bathing in the mountain torrents.

> 'We went to church (writes John Everett Millais to a friend), and took a delightful walk to a waterfall of seventy feet, where we had a bathe, my brother and self – he standing in the torrent of water, which must have punished his back as severely as a soldier's cat-o'-nine-tails whipping. It is quite impossible to walk by these mountain rivers without undressing and jumping in.'

These delights were not, of course, for Effie, though in spite of capes, big hats and wind-swollen petticoats she was nearly always of the party, Millais making sketch after sketch of her. They used to go out fishing for salmon in Loch Achray: Ruskin sent some of Millais's fish to his parents.

> 'I am so very glad (he writes on September 21) the salmon came well and tasted well. I don't like any *killing* sports, but there was great interest in seeing the fish brought up through the dark water . . . and thrust into the shallow current among the rocks, his scales flashing through the amber water and white foam.'

In the evenings they would discuss art or Scotch history. Millais was a lively creature, and used to make admirable pen-sketches, even when his subject was not Effie, whom he was beginning so greatly to admire. He would draw designs satirizing the Old Masters, or illustrations for a comic history of Scotland. There survive, among other sketches of his, a spirited representation of 'Black Agnes dusting Dunbar Castle,' and of Lord James of Douglas fishing disconsolately to provide food for two adoring ladies. These were made to tease Effie, who took Scotch history

very seriously, and used to hold forth on the great deeds of such champions of liberty and Christianity. But she was not offended.

After about five weeks of rain and wind the weather got a little better. Acland, who had joined them, began to sketch again, and Millais to work out of doors at his big canvases.

> 'Ruskin comes and works with us (writes Millais) and we dine on the rocks all together. We have, in fine weather, immense enjoyment painting out on the rocks and having our dinner brought to us there, and in the evening climbing up the steep mountains for exercise, Mrs. Ruskin accompanying us.'

Then he makes more sketches of the party. Effie is always shown as charming in a cloak and wide pilgrim hat, and miraculously neat in the worst weather. A sketch called *Wayside Refreshment* shows Millais frankly on his knees before her, officially because he is offering her a cup of water from the stream.

Ruskin and Millais are still on admirable terms, however. Ruskin writes to his father:

> 'Millais is a very interesting study, but I don't know how to manage him; his mind is so *terribly* active, so full of invention, that he can hardly stay quiet a moment without sketching either ideas or reminiscences, and keeps himself awake all night with planning pictures. He cannot go on in this way; I must get Acland to lecture him.'

Acland was just as much struck by Ruskin's output and enthusiasm. 'Truth and earnestness of purpose are his great guides, and no labour of work or thought is wearisome to him. . . . I had no idea of the intensity of his religious feeling before now.'

Acland one day suggested that Millais should paint

Ruskin standing on the rocks, with the torrent thundering beside him.[1] Ruskin was delighted.

> 'Millais (he writes on July 6) has fixed on his place, a lovely piece of worn rock, with foaming water and weeds and moss, and a noble overhanging bank of dark crag; and I am to be standing looking quietly down the stream; just the sort of thing I used to do for hours together. He is very happy at the idea of doing it, and I think you will be proud of the picture, and we shall have the two most wonderful torrents in the world, Turner's "St. Gothard," and Millais's "Glenfinlas." He is going to take the utmost possible pains with it, and says he can paint rocks and water better than anything else. I am sure the foam of the torrent will be something quite new in art.'

There is a difference of opinion as to the terms on which the party broke up. Holman Hunt, Millais's great friend, declares in his *Pre-Raphaelitism* that they had not been long at Glenfinlas before Millais more or less formally complained to Ruskin of his 'want of display of interest in the occupations and entertainments of Mrs. Ruskin.' . . . 'Remonstrances,' Hunt goes on, 'grew into complaints, and gradually the guest found himself championing the lady against her legal lord and master.' Collingwood corroborates this, and speaks of this as a period of domestic anxiety such as would have paralysed another man.

The tone in which Ruskin himself writes of the place seems rather to contradict this. In October he says that he is sorry to leave the cottage, and that the hills seem more beautiful than ever.

> 'We have been since 5th July living in this kind of house (sketch), a bog in front – a wonderful rocky dingle

[1] See Plate facing p. 170.

> in the distance . . . where Millais is painting a picture of a torrent among rocks, which will make a revolution in landscape painting if he can only get it finished. . . . I have stopped all this time to keep Millais company – to keep him up to the Pre-Raphaelite degree of finish (on the background of the portrait). . . . I have got maps of all the lichens on the rocks, and the bubbles painted in the foam.'

Such comments, written to various correspondents, do not sound like the utterances of a jealous man.

However, it is clear that Ruskin could often be very dense where human relationships were concerned; while it is also possible that he realized, without resenting, Euphemia's and Millais's growing love. The party broke up of necessity, for Ruskin had launched into a new activity. He was due in Edinburgh on the 1st of November to deliver a course of lectures on architecture and painting.

§ 2

Ruskin's parents disapproved of his lecturing. Mr. Collingwood says that at thirty-four they considered him too young; while Messrs. Cook and Wedderburn say that his parents seem to have thought 'that there was something derogatory in appearing on a platform as a public lecturer. . . . Besides, Ruskin's father, who was already beginning to wonder whether *Modern Painters* would ever be resumed and finished, saw in this new departure a fresh danger of dissipation of energies.'

Ruskin wrote from Glenfinlas at enormous length to try and persuade his parents of the harmlessness of this new venture.

> 'I do not mean at *any* time to take up the trade of a lecturer; all my real efforts will be made in writing, and

all that I intend to do is merely – as if in conversation – to say to these people, who are ready to listen to me, some of the simple truths about architecture and painting which may perhaps be better put in conversational than literary form.'

After all, he pleads, Edinburgh was his father's native city: it would be pious for him to give his first lecture there.

'Edinburgh artists (he goes on) . . . are all eager to meet me, while the London ones are all too happy to get out of my way. . . . I have given plenty of lectures with only one or two people to listen to me, and I don't see why it should be a great condescension to spend the same words on the cleverest people in Edinburgh. Every one of my friends whom I have mentioned my purpose to – and I spoke of it to many in London when I first got Lewis's letter – strongly urged me to lecture: there was not one dissentient voice. I hope, as you think over the matter more, it may not seem so objectionable to you.'

Three days later his daily letter turns on the same subject.

'The lectures have been quite by the way. I will promise you the first chapter of *Modern Painters* as a New Year's gift, if I remain in good health.'

In the end Ruskin and Effie duly went off to Edinburgh, the lectures were given, and proved a triumphant success. The scene was recorded by the *Edinburgh Guardian* (in its issue for November 19, 1853):

'The door by the side of the platform opens, and a thin gentleman with light hair, a stiff white cravat, dark overcoat with velvet collar, walking, too, with a slight stoop, goes up to the desk, and looking round with a self-possessed and somewhat formal air, proceeds to

take off his great-coat, revealing thereby, in addition to the orthodox white cravat, the most orthodox of white waistcoats. . . . "Dark hair, pale face, and massive marble brow – that is my ideal of Mr. Ruskin," said a young lady near us. This proved to be quite a fancy portrait, as unlike the reality as could well be imagined. Mr. Ruskin has light sand-coloured hair; his face is more red than pale; the mouth well cut, with a good deal of decision in its curve, though somewhat wanting in sustained dignity and strength; an aquiline nose; his forehead by no means broad or massive, but the brows full and well bound together; the eye we could not see in consequence of the shadows that fell upon his countenance from the lights overhead, but we are sure it must be soft and luminous, and that the poetry and passion we looked for almost in vain in other features are concentrated there. . . .

'And now for the style of the lecture, you say: what was it? Properly speaking, there were in the lectures two styles essentially distinct, and not well blended – a speaking and a writing style; the former colloquial and spoken off-hand; the latter rhetorical and carefully read in quite a different voice – we had almost said intoned. When speaking of the sketches on the wall, or employing local illustrations – such as the buildings of the city – he talked in an apt, easy, and often humorous manner, but in treating the general relations of the subject, he had recourse to the manuscript leaves on the desk, written in a totally different style, and, naturally enough, read in a very different tone of voice. The effect of this transition was often strange; the audience, too, evidently sometimes had a difficulty in following the rapid change, and did not always keep up with the movement. It would on all accounts have been better had one style been observed throughout. This was

plainly seen in the lectures on Turner and the Pre-Raphaelites, which were almost entirely read, and certainly had far more unity and compactness than either of the previous ones. Mr. Ruskin's elocution is peculiar; in the rising and falling of his voice at measured intervals, in a way scarcely ever heard except in the public lection of the service appointed to be read in churches. These are the two things with which, perhaps, you are most surprised – his dress and his manner of speaking – both of which (the white waistcoat, notwithstanding) are eminently clerical. You naturally expect, in one so independent, a manner free from conventional restraint, and an utterance, whatever may be the power of voice, at least expressive of a strong individuality; and you find instead a Christ Church man of ten years' standing, who has not yet taken orders; his dress and manner derived from his college tutor, and his elocution from the chapel reader. At first you altogether refuse to identify the lecturer with the author of *Modern Painters* and the *Seven Lamps*; he sometimes reminds you of that individual, but is still not the same. By degrees, however, you get over this feeling; you see more points of resemblance, and begin to understand that they are really one. This, for the most part, is the effect of the more solemn and earnest passages, whether of exhortation, warning, denunciation, or entreaty, which are, more than anything beside, characteristic of both lecturer and writer.'

The lectures were crowded, and the applause unstinted. Ruskin became, of course, an habitual lecturer, and it should be remarked that, until the final phase, he seems to have been generally considered a first-rate performer. Most of the faults recorded by the *Guardian* disappeared, and he became apt, easy, and humorous.

§ 3

Much as his parents had disapproved of this venture (partly obviously from sheer nervousness), they were eager for details when it was all over. Everything that appeared, or had been said, or could be gathered, must be at once transmitted to them. Ruskin tries to calm them down, and assure them that it was natural that the lecture should be a success.

> 'I did not consider its delivery as a critical period in my life, but merely as a compliance with John Lewis's request; a compliment to him, and a thing likely certainly to do some good to my cause in general. When, however, I heard that Lady Trevelyan and others of my friends were coming hundreds of miles to hear me, and found how much importance the Edinburgh people attached to the thing themselves, I saw that I must do more than I at first intended; and now, when I find that I have to address a thousand people each night, besides crowded passage-fulls, there is nothing for it but doing as well as I possibly can. . . .
> 'Lady Trevelyan says everybody was alike delighted with the last; and that she heard a man whose time was very valuable, muttering, near her, at being obliged to wait for an hour in order to get a place, but saying afterwards that he would have waited *two* hours rather than have missed it. She and I got into some divinity discussions, until she got very angry, and declared that when she read me and heard me at a distance she thought me so wise that anybody might make an idol of me, and worship me to any extent; but when she got to talk to me I turned out only a *rag-doll* after all.'

But even with this, and Effie's letters, and many others,

the old fanatics at Denmark Hill were not satisfied and wrote complaining. They had been told what he had said, how he had said it, and how it was received, but till the *Edinburgh Guardian* came in, nobody had remembered to mention how he was dressed.

CHAPTER XVI

1853–1854: Aged 34–35

HAPPINESS, AND THE NOTE ON THE PINCUSHION

'The Cataracts Blew . . .'

§ 1

After the experiences of Glenfinlas and the triumphs of Edinburgh, the Ruskins came home and settled down at Herne Hill again. Ruskin was busy preparing his lectures for publication; but he resumed his sittings to Millais, so it is clear Effie had not caused any open quarrel between the two men. Whether, instead, there was a tacit understanding that, in a franker age, might have blossomed into a new and more satisfactory friendship, it is impossible to say.

By the spring all sorts of gossip had begun to go about London. Ruskin was said to be unfaithful to his wife – she was wretched – she was to blame – there were all kinds of stories. At last in April, 1854, the expected happened. Effie left without a word, save the traditional note on the pincushion. Lockhart writes to the daughter Charlotte whom Ruskin had wanted so much to marry:

> 'I am not surprised, but sorry, to hear whispers of a separation between —— and her virtuoso, whose neglects have at last exhausted her patience; but I shall have particulars whenever I meet the Eastlakes. Until then – mum.'

JOHN RUSKIN, 1853

From a portrait by J. E. Millais

Effie did not go to Millais, but simply took train and went back to her father's house at Perth.

§ 2

The reader will get some idea of the difficulties in the way of a biographer's finding out what really happened and why, and how the people concerned felt about it, by two instances of the way in which this subject is treated by Ruskin's contemporaries. In the two-volume biography of Ruskin by Mr. Collingwood (often quoted here, and one of the main and most agreeable sources of information), Effie's maiden name is never mentioned. She was reprobate, and therefore not to be spoken of.

On the other hand, in John G. Millais's two-volume life of his father, John Everett Millais, the fact that Euphemia Gray was once called Mrs. Ruskin is never mentioned. 'Mrs. Ruskin' is often referred to, while, naturally, 'Euphemia Gray,' 'my mother,' and 'Lady Millais' are constantly coming in. There is, however, not a word to identify the two women. This is how Millais the younger writes of his mother's marriage:

> 'On July 3rd, 1855, John Everett Millais was married to Euphemia Chalmers Gray, eldest daughter of Mr. George Gray of Bowerswell, Perth. In accordance with Scottish custom the wedding took place in the drawing-room at Bowerswell.
>
> '(*Footnote.* Miss Gray had been previously married, but that marriage had been annulled in 1854, on grounds sanctioned equally by Church and State. Both good taste and feeling seem to require that no detailed reference should be made to the circumstances attending that annulment, but on behalf of those who loved their mother well, it may surely be said that during

the course of the judicial proceedings instituted by her, and throughout the period of the void marriage and the whole of her life in after years, not one word could be, or ever was, uttered impugning the correctness and purity of her life.)'

Whether she went then with Ruskin's blessing or his curse, whether she went impelled by hate or attracted by love, can only be guessed. There was plenty of talk at the time, and most of it was not too well informed. Mrs. Carlyle sympathized with Effie and wrote a week or two afterwards:

[1] 'Mrs. Ruskin has been taken to Scotland by *her* parents; and Ruskin has gone to Switzerland with *his*; and the separation is understood to be permanent. There is even a rumour that *Mrs.* Ruskin is to sue for a divorce. I know nothing about it, except that I have always pitied Mrs. Ruskin, while people generally blame her – for love of dress and company and flirtation. She was too young and pretty to be so left to her own devices, as she was by her husband, who seemed to wish nothing more of her but the credit of having a pretty, well-dressed wife.'

Old James Ruskin was furiously angry; and he, at least, knew that Millais was the cause of it all. For he threatened to put a penknife through Millais's Glenfinlas portrait of his son. But Ruskin, with great presence of mind, smuggled the picture into a cab and carried it off to Rossetti's studio, where it could be safe till the storm was over. Several of Ruskin's friends wrote to him to know if they could be of any use, for gossip was making him a monster of immorality; but he wrote back saying they could do nothing except by not disturbing him or thinking hardly of him.

[1] J. W. Carlyle, *New Letters and Memorials*.

'You cannot contradict reports. The world must for the present have its full swing. Do not vex yourself about it as far as you are sorry, lest such powers as I may have should be shortened. Be assured I shall neither be subdued nor materially changed by this matter. The worst of it for me has long been past.'

Mr. Collingwood is very sorry for his chief over this business.

'People considered Ruskin the luckiest of men (he writes). The fancy of the outside public pictured him in the possession of rare works of art, of admiring friends, of a beautiful wife. They did not know, as we do, the strange ill-omened circumstances of his marriage; they could not guess, as the thoughtful reader can, the effort needed on his part to do what he believed to be his duty toward a wife whose affection he earnestly sought, but whose tastes were discordant with his; nor, on the other hand, the disappointment and disillusioning of a young girl, who found herself married, by parental arrangement, to a man with whom she had nothing in common; in habits of thought and life, though not so much in years, her senior; taking "small notice, or austerely," of the gayer world she preferred, "his mind half buried in some weightier argument, or fancy-borne perhaps upon the rise and long roll" of his periods. And his readers and the public were intensely puzzled when she left him.'

Apparently London was divided into two camps, those who took his part and those who took hers. Most of his own friends seem to have sided with him, and 'exonerated him from blame' (whatever that may mean). 'Ruskin,' Mr. Collingwood goes on, in a phrase which may be either quaint or significant, 'with his consciousness of having

fulfilled all the obligations he had undertaken, set up no defence.' The idea that this phrase may have a definite meaning is diminished by the fact that Mr. Collingwood brings forward as one of the proofs of his 'blamelessness' that Miss Mitford stood firmly by him and at this dramatic juncture introduced him to the Robert Brownings. Years afterwards Ruskin admitted to Mr. George Macdonald that the marriage had, as the court decided, only been one in name, and added that he would have felt it wrong and horrible that he and Effie should be more to each other until he could love her. That, he said, he could never learn to do.[1]

At all events, Ruskin went to Switzerland with his parents, and, angry or relieved, soothed or enraged, by all the hush-hush and the moral judgments that were being passed about under a blanket of circumlocution, he soon threw off the whole business and was exquisitely happy.

It seemed as though, with the breaking of the tie with Effie, a weight had slipped off him. His separation from her may have seemed the withdrawing of an ever-present symbol of his inability or unwillingness to live the life of normal men. Perhaps, again, his relief was like that of the drug-taker who tries to reform, but, with the blessed excuse of some external crisis, slips back with tears of joy to his old indulgence. He may, that is, merely have felt that he was safe with his parents, that there was no more double allegiance; and that he had given up the struggle.

§ 3

Be the cause what it may, Ruskin was happy in Switzerland – happier than he had been for a long time. The old days of the 'Tour' were back again. He and his parents went to Geneva, to Vevey, through the Simmenthal, to

[1] Communicated to the writer by Dr. Greville Macdonald.

Thun. Once more his life tasted sweet. Here, among the mountains, he experienced an exquisite spiritual exaltation. He felt himself summoned and bound straitly once more to his task of declaring aloud the beauties of nature. In more than one outpouring of grace upon him he realized in himself what Proust recognized in him, the inspired and unique observer and lover of nature. He was happy in feeling such strength rush upon him: the sweetness and glory of the Alps possessed him.

> 'The Jungfrau and two Eigers were clear and soft in the intense mountain light; a field of silver cloud filled the valley above the Lake of Brienz. . . . I stood long, praying that these happy hours and holy sights might be of more use to me than they have been, and might be remembered by me in hours of temptation or mortification.'

At Lucerne the mood still held – and once again he was rapt. He speaks of keeping one of these days as a festival for ever, 'having received my third call from God. Every day here,' he writes, 'I seem to see farther into nature, and into myself, and into futurity.'

Another month passed, and still the meadows were transfigured, the mountains hung white in the sky, and the cataracts blew their silver trumpets. For his daily readings of the Bible he chose the Beatitudes and the Book of Revelation. On the 13th of August he declares himself stronger in health, higher in hope and deeper in peace than he has been for years. He cannot be thankful enough, or happy enough, a fragile mist of beauty seems wrapped about him.

The journey did not break the mood, but it jolted it back into homelier channels, so that the glory he had brought down from the mountains might irrigate the fields of men. He came back, in fact, full of schemes for new work – wild,

most of them. 'I am rolling projects over and over in my head,' he writes. He tells, half in joke, how he wants to give lectures to an audience of two hundred sign-painters, another to shop-decorators and writing-masters, another to up-upholsterers and masons, another to potters, and young artists, another to young men in general, and another to young ladies in general. He wants to lend out prints of Turner and Albrecht Dürer to everybody who wants them, and form a loan collection of thirteenth-century MSS. But this (he is laughing at himself) is to be all merely by the way, and done left-handedly, while he goes on with *Modern Painters*, and the great new work he meant to write about politics. He has walked with God and comes down to declare His wonders to men.

PART III

CHAPTER XVII

1854–1856: Aged 35–37

THE WORKING MEN'S COLLEGE AND AN OXFORD DIGRESSION

§ 1

The Ruskins got back from the 'Tour' in October. Ruskin got to work, almost immediately, not only upon lecturing and writing, but also in what was for him a new direction.

A body of men, with many of whose ideas Ruskin was in sympathy, had set up, in a house in Red Lion Square, an institution which they called the Working Men's College. The group was headed by Frederick Maurice, the famous Broad Churchman, and included Tom Hughes and Charles Kingsley. So much were they of a like mind with Ruskin, that they used as a manifesto of the movement a chapter from *Stones of Venice*. Though its founders called themselves Socialists, this Working Men's College was by no means a revolutionary institution, but rather in the nature of a university settlement.

Frederick Maurice had first come into contact with the working class through being a chaplain at Guy's Hospital. But he had also done, on a small scale, the sort of educational work proposed for the College, and now hoped to set up his

evening classes in a larger way, and with a staff of adequate and, if possible, distinguished helpers.

A rather grotesque testimonial from a body of working men which had been presented to Maurice a year before Ruskin's introduction to the work, shows the tone of the institution. The working men say for instance (with unquotable circumulocution) that they are grateful for his efforts and the sacrifices he has made, 'to improve the condition of the class to which the undersigned belong,' and that they thank him for his endeavours 'to introduce a higher and purer tone' into their daily life. These efforts have, the testimonial finally declares, 'been accompanied by an urbanity, and kindliness of tone, which has much enhanced their value.'

But it is clear from many other tokens that there was nothing egalitarian about Red Lion Square. There is apparent, instead, gratitude on the one hand, and gentleness and compassion on the other. If a further and amusing proof is needed of the School's mild Liberalism, it is to be found in the expulsion from it of two astonished French Socialist refugees, who had begun to teach there, but had later revealed their adhesion to that set of 'mad and wicked doctrines' which had raised the barricades in 1848. It was with great relief that Maurice later read in the newspaper that one of them (named Tailandier) had publicly refused to be associated with any body of Englishmen except the Chartists.

His school was indeed founded upon a sense of compassion very much to the right of that which is expressed in Disraeli's *Sybil*. Why, the amiable Frederick Maurice had asked himself, should not young gentlemen newly down from the university impart some of their new knowledge to their less fortunate brothers?[1] 'Thus a connecting bond between the universities and the mass of the people might

[1] *Life of F. B. Maurice.*

be formed, and the Church would show that it could educate the nation.'

But Ruskin was too sensitive, and too much of a perfectionist, to be happy in this sort of work. So, though he learnt a great deal at Red Lion Square, and though his heart was moved by what he saw there of spirits like his own, struggling through the briers of working-class disabilities, yet his work was not altogether a success either for himself or for the scholars. He helped three or four individuals, and found two lifelong disciples and helpers there in George Allen and Henry Swann. But that was virtually all.

Perhaps if the tone of the school had been less condescending, a real fellowship might have been evolved; Ruskin might have come out of his shell and found the outside criticism and the companionship that he needed so much. But in any case Red Lion Square probably came too late in his career for anything of that sort to happen. When he began to teach there, he was too deeply enclosed to react even to the most genial atmosphere of give-and-take. He was thirty-five; but at Denmark Hill approval and disapproval were still being punctually weighed out to him in the little brass scales of his mother's judgment, and these scruples still stood to him as something near eternal truths.

No spirit strong enough to liberate him was likely to be distilled in the Working Men's College.

Mr. Collingwood writes in a rather depressed vein of Ruskin's work there:

> 'Only the reader who has engaged in this form of philanthropic labour – old-fashioned night-schools, or modern lads' clubs or carving-classes – quite understands what it involves, and how difficult it is for an artist or a literary man, after his sedentary day's work, to drag his tired brain and over-excited nerves to a

> crowded room in some unsavoury neighbourhood, and to endure the noise, and glare, the closeness, and, worst of all, perhaps, the indocility of a class of learners for whom the discipline of the ordinary school or college does not exist; who must be coaxed to work, and humoured into perseverance; and for whom the lowest rung in the ladder of culture is a giddy elevation. Such work has indeed its reward, but never exceeding great; and it has more discouragements and difficulties than one cares to reckon up. To people who know their Ruskin only as the elegant theorist of art, sentimental and egotistic, as they will have it, there must be something strange, almost irreconcilable, in his devotion, week after week, and year after year, to such a labour.'

An odd co-worker of Ruskin's here was Rossetti, whom Ruskin had got to know in the short interval between his return from the Edinburgh lectures, and his withdrawal from society upon Effie's disappearance. His and Burne-Jones's presence at Red Lion Square suggests a corrective to Mr. Collingwood's sad and bewildered recollections of 'philanthropic labour.' For, in fact, the five years from the autumn of 1854 to 1859 were among the happiest of Ruskin's life. They were packed with all sorts of activity, and if Ruskin seems occasionally to have got rather exhausted in the zigzags of all these doings, he yet seems on the whole to have been cheerful and confident.

The fact was that, whether the work of teaching was disagreeable or not, the new impulse – Ruskin's new awareness of the 'condition of England' question – was finding what seemed for the moment a satisfactory outlet. The irritant was removed. This direct attempt at passing on his own inheritance of culture to the disinherited, satisfied his conscience, and temporarily stopped the chafing of his new convictions. So for a time the various streams through which

his life ran, seemed harmonious. Politics, a polite life, science, and the arts, all seemed for the moment to be compatible. Effie was gone, and he could serve and obey his parents unreminded. He wrote *Modern Painters*, he helped and counselled the fast blossoming Rossetti, or consorted with the Gothic architects, or Utopian Socialists, who were growing up round him – William Morris, Philip Webb, Street, and Burne-Jones. He lectured, he wrote, and he arranged Turners for the National Gallery.

§ 2

There was one further enterprise which now engaged him. Though it is not proposed in this study to follow Ruskin in all his characteristic dashes – now into theology at Sheffield, now into geology at Manchester – still this major excursion must not be ignored; for its results are two tangible buildings by whose merits or demerits we can form some estimate of Ruskins architectural sense, as apart from his veneration for the past and his sense of the picturesque.

For nearly ten years then, Ruskin's old friend Henry Acland, the physiologist, had been agitating for an Honours School in Natural Science at Oxford. In his efforts to get such a school set up, Acland had of course Ruskin's support. In the third volume of *Stones of Venice* Ruskin had drawn attention to the fact that Natural Science was not taught at Oxford and had said how unfortunate he felt this to be. At last, in 1854, £30,000 was voted by Convocation for the building of a Science School and Museum.

The controversy over the question of whether there should be a Science building at all, was little more acute than the controversy over what sort of building should be put up; and here Acland of course further consulted Ruskin. Finally the job was put out to competition, and the designs narrowed down to two. One was by the younger Barry and was in the

Classic style, and one by a young architect called Woodward 'in the style of Veronese Gothic.' Largely through Ruskin's influence the Gothic design was chosen, and the foundations of the Oxford Museum were laid in 1855.

If it be impossible to admire Woodward as an architect, we may yet pity him as a man. Every item in the building accounts was disputed in Convocation. For example, gas lamps for lighting the building were voted by a narrow majority, but, by a snap vote, the motion in favour of providing burners for the gas lamps was defeated.

On one side Woodward had the dons, who were shocked out of their skins by his Gothic method of leaving decorative details to the individual workman; on the other side he had Ruskin, giving quantities of fluent and unpractical advice. However, Ruskin did give him valuable public support, though in private he was not always wholly enthusiastic. He wrote in a letter, 'I think the design, though by no means first-rate, yet quite as good as we are likely to get in these days, and on the whole good.'

Ruskin himself drew some of the details for iron-work and window embellishments, and much of the 'Gothic enrichment' was done by a band of working masons who had helped to put up a similar building for Woodward in Dublin. Every day the dons used to come with lifted hands to watch what was going on, and the builder's men, to whom Ruskin lectured in the evening, had to stand a great deal of disapproval by day.

O'Shea, one of the best of the sculptor masons, got tired of all this. One day a don in authority came up and asked him what he was carving, to which he replied, 'Monkeys.' 'Stop directly,' said the don. 'You are spoiling the property of the University.' 'I carve as Mr. Woodward bids me,' replied O'Shea, but at last sulkily left off.

The next day he was carving again, when the don once more came up, and was furious to see him apparently

engaged in the same work. O'Shea protested that this time he was carving cats, but hot words passed. The don insisted that O'Shea should be dismissed. This was reluctantly done for the sake of peace, and O'Shea was to do no more on the building.

However, when Henry Acland, the building's godfather, came round on the morning after the row, he found to his surprise that O'Shea was working like a fury over the principal doorway of the Museum. The chips were flying under his chisel. 'What are you carving?' calls out Acland. 'Ow-wls and pahrots – ow-wls and pahrots – Members of Convocation – Members of Convocation!' shouted O'Shea in Celtic rage, and there, roughly blocked out in the stone, were several caricatures.

Alas! a less insubordinate workman was employed to knock their heads off. Now only the stumps and faint outlines of the birds can be seen. They are on the right-hand side of the chief door to one of the ugliest buildings in Oxford.

For that seems the just verdict upon Ruskin, and upon poor, silent, patient Woodward. In the Oxford Museum and the Union Debating rooms [1] they produced, with infinite care, two buildings of unparalleled ugliness. They appear to have been designed by a man who had no sense either of colour or texture. Even now, when three-quarters of a century must have mellowed them considerably, the steep roofs of purple slates relieved with patterns of green, and the large unpleasant bricks of one, and the gingerish stone of the other, are extremely grating.

Probably Woodward, like Ruskin, had his head full of serpentine, and coloured marbles. Denied these, he felt brick and stone to be so decidedly second best, as not to be worth troubling about.

But the subject of the Victorian's curious blindness to

[1] Now the Library.

texture in building is a large one. It is enough to say here that texture was just as wantonly disregarded by Ruskin's Woodward in Oxford, as it was by the nameless builders of Corporation Street in Birmingham, of Victoria Street in Bristol, of the City Hall in Glasgow, or of the thousands of large and important buildings that were beginning to spring up all through England under the influence of Ruskin's books.

Now a critic and a theoretician must not be judged by buildings put up by hasty readers of his precepts. But with the Oxford Museum the case is altered. In as far as a layman can direct a building, and within the rather narrow money limits set by Convocation, Ruskin did direct and approve the Oxford Museum, and he still more approved the Union building. The truth is that they are only a very little, if at all, better than the average Victorian Gothic building which Ruskin rightly despised. It is necessary to bear these two buildings in mind if we feel inclined to yield sometimes in matters of architectural taste to Ruskin's sweet deluding tongue, and to his air of taste and erudition.

The view that in many directions Ruskin's taste was rather bad, may seem to some people iconoclastic, but it is not new. A lady who knew him pretty well as a girl (and moved among the Pre-Raphaelites) told the present writer that it was a general opinion in cultivated circles that though Ruskin had an admirable taste in pictures, a quite unrivalled eye for natural beauty, and astonishing powers of description, yet his taste in the applied arts was bad. She instanced in support of this, being on a visit to a family of artists when news came that a set of dining-room chairs designed by Ruskin were to be seen at a shop near by. 'Let's all go and see them,' said her host. 'They are sure to be hideous'; and, she added, 'So they were.'

This lady also spoke of a peculiarly ugly and pious trinket which Ruskin once brought her from Italy – a black marble

cross with forget-me-nots twined round it. 'It was frightful, yet, you know, I kept it – I've got it now. I can't help valuing it. That shows you there was something great about the man.'

This curious limitation in the field of æsthetics, and its acknowledgment, at any rate by the younger generation in his circle, is worth bearing in mind.

§ 3

By 1855 Ruskin had, besides his pupils at Red Lion Square, an enormous number of more genteel drawing pupils by correspondence; and it was partly in order that they might know what to admire and what to condemn, in the current art of the day, that he began in the May of 1855 to write his *Academy Notes*.

The *Academy Notes* were, however, also intended to have a second function. He hoped to influence current art practice in England, and he did not hope in vain. One year he would tell people to paint apple-blossom, and the next year the walls of the Academy would blush pink. Fashion, and the buyers, followed all Ruskin's convolutions, and it was dangerous to disregard his instructions.

Punch summed up the situation:

POEM BY A PERFECTLY FURIOUS ACADEMICIAN

I takes and paints,
Hears no complaints
And sells before I'm dry;
Till savage Ruskin
He sticks his tusk in,
Then nobody will buy.

His authority was remarkable. William Rossetti says that Madox Brown, for instance, who was never accorded

a word in the *Academy Notes*, 'got to hate the very name of Ruskin' because he felt himself 'insulted and damnified' by Ruskin's silence. Ruskin's power might have had awkward consequences if he had not been magnanimous as well as formal. For Millais's pictures were important ingredients in the Academies of those years.

Millais had married Effie, the woman that Ruskin did not want; so convention insisted that Ruskin and Millais should not be on speaking terms. Good taste obliged them to be enemies.

But nevertheless, when it came to criticizing Millais's pictures, Ruskin behaved like a reasonable human being, and not like a Victorian gentleman. However awkward their relations on the social plane might be, on the professional plane Ruskin's attitude was perfect. He still admired Millais's pictures, and he still declared his sentiments in public: he still criticized some of Millais's ways, and he still expressed these doubts. In 1855 – the year of Millais's marriage to Effie – and later in the year of the birth of their first child, Ruskin was enthusiastic over Millais's work.

These notes of Ruskin's were said by a reviewer to 'create a sort of tumult among artists, which is caught up and echoed by people out-of-doors, and enjoyed with all the zest of a scandal.' His combined vogue and prestige as a critic have never been equalled.

Nor was this public criticism Ruskin's only way of influencing the art of painting. For several years, for instance, he bought most of Rossetti's output and praised and abused him alternately. The two men saw each other constantly. William Rossetti, Dante Gabriel's brother, is one of the many who bore witness both to Ruskin's dictatorial ways and to the 'tender and exquisite amiability that made him a man apart.'

A 'man apart' he remained, in more senses than one. The Pre-Raphaelites, both of the first and second generation,

contrived a real communal life for themselves: they were poor amid a rich society, they were informal among rigid conventions, they were gay and democratic, among snobbery and formality. But, because the atmosphere at Denmark Hill was so different, Ruskin never mixed with them as a real comrade.

A painter named James Smeetham, who walked over to Denmark Hill one winter's evening, gives a picture of the Ruskin household in 1855:

> 'He has a large house with a lodge, and a valet and footman and coachman, and grand rooms glittering with pictures, chiefly Turners, and his father and mother live with him, or he with them. His father is a fine old gentleman, who has a lot of bushy grey hair, and eyebrows sticking up all rough and knowing, with a comfortable way of coming up to you with his hands in his pockets and making *you* comfortable, and saying, in answer to your remark, that "John's" prose works are pretty good.
>
> 'His mother is a ruddy, dignified, richly-dressed old gentlewoman of seventy-five, who knows Chamonix better than Camberwell; evidently a *good* old lady, with the *Christian Treasury* tossing about on the table. She puts "John" down, and holds her own opinions, and flatly contradicts him; and he receives all her opinions with a soft reverence and gentleness that is pleasant to witness. . . .
>
> 'To other people he certainly bursts out with a remark and in a contradictious way, but only because he believes it, with no air of dogmatism or conceit. He is different at home from that which he is in a lecture before a mixed audience, and there is a spiritual sweetness in the half-timid expression of his eyes. . . .
>
> 'He spent some time in this way: Unhanging a Turner

from the wall of a distant room, he brought it to the table and put it in my hands; then we talked; then he went up into his study to fetch down some illustrative print or drawing; in one case a literal view which he had travelled fifty miles to make, in order to compare with the picture. And so he kept on gliding all over the house, hanging and unhanging, and stopping a few minutes to talk.'

CHAPTER XVIII

1855–1858: Aged 36–39

THE NARRATIVE SUSPENDED AND RESUMED

§ 1

With Ruskin's reputation at its height, at a period when he was not only an extremely successful public character, but even seemed for a year or two satisfied with his own performances, it seems time to review some of his opinions. We shall do well to take a look at the Ruskin of the *Academy Notes*, before we come to his intervention in economics and to the declension which his fame suffered in the 'sixties. Six years later all the reviewers were against him, and the sharp arrows of Victorian vituperation made a St. Sebastian of him.

What, then, did the Ruskin of the 'fifties, at the height of his vogue, believe and try to teach about the arts?

A present-day student of Ruskin's works has suggested that the key to his attitude to the arts, and especially to his æsthetic dogmatism, is to be found in the fact that he lived at the beginning of the age of science. This student sees, in short, not the Ruskin whom Proust chose for analysis, but the contemporary of Huxley and Darwin. This view has been briefly spoken of before. It is supported by a phrase which Ruskin uses in a letter.

'I must speak (he writes) if I see people thinking what

> I know is wrong, and if there is any chance of my being listened to. I don't say I wouldn't care for reputation if I had it, but until people are ready to receive all I say about Art as "unquestionable," just as they receive what Faraday tells them about Chemistry, I do not consider myself to have any reputation at all worth caring about.'

This is either the language of the most fantastic vanity, or else it shows the influence of the scientific spirit, and a belief in an objective truth, which can be reached by painting pictures.

In another place he says: 'Twenty years of severe labour, devoted exclusively to the study of the principles of Art, have given me a right to speak on the subject with a measure of confidence.'

Let us now credit him with the notion of there being absolute scientific 'Truth' and 'Falsehood' in the arts, and let us put that notion to Ruskin's belief in his own mission. Let us add to these his knowledge of his own hard study, and his belief in the interdependence of happiness, civic morality, and the arts. We have in this triple concept probably got a fair notion of Ruskin's views on art, and of his own interpretation of his intense desire to teach others and to form their opinions.

Along with most of the more sensitive of the Victorian intellectuals, Ruskin felt that the world was going wrong. What he saw in the 'fifties was a failure, as he felt it, of civilization. He knew England thoroughly, and had seen the rise of Sheffield, Birmingham, Glasgow, Manchester, Oldham, Hull, Bradford, and Leeds: such towns as Coventry and Barrow-in-Furness, Crewe, and a dozen others, were still villages or market towns, but they threatened. He saw the country growing physically uglier, and the people more numerous but not more happy: Americans visiting England noticed that in England, much more than on the Continent,

social relationships were stiff and savage. The working class was cut off from its old sources of peasant culture, and, as Ruskin knew from his pupils at Red Lion Square, had no time for civilizing pursuits. The cultivated classes despised the workers for their ignorance and uncouthness. Ruskin was convinced that selfishness, snobbery and greed, underlay the immediate causes of these national maladies. He believed, like his disciple William Morris, that Art, and a true understanding of the beauties and wonders of nature, were the civilizing medicine for lack of which the physical world was growing brick-laden and smoke-soiled, and classes and nations full of hate for one another. In a love of the arts and of beauty, were alone to be found a refining influence, and a new set of values which should off-set the rush for wealth and position. Through the arts, even more than through religion, could the soul of the world be saved and joy be brought back to England.

But if the laws of art were scientific and exact, it meant that there were only a few men who could set the world to seek this lost joy with any hope of success. And so he wrote, and went out, and himself taught both rich and poor, and bent his best energies, his charm, and his matchless eloquence, to the task. As he had hoped (and indeed expected) all England listened.

Outwardly, then, in the 'fifties all Ruskin's energies were still given to this influencing of the state of the nation through the arts. But the mood in which he had written to *The Times* from Venice still often came back to him. He was becoming aware of other and more direct methods. He did not call in question all that his father had told him of the madness and wickedness of Chartism, or of the barricades in Paris. But he was becoming 'class conscious' in the uncomfortable manner so well known to all bourgeois converts to Socialism. He was beginning to feel ashamed of his privileges, and above all ashamed of the poverty

and narrowness to which his fellow-countrymen were condemned.

Why then, the Socialist may ask, did Ruskin take so long about coming out with it? Why, after the letters to *The Times* from Venice, did he sit on the fence for six years?

Disregarding any possible deeper explanation of his slowness, it is easy to account for his delay. Æsthetics, especially the understanding of the wonders and beauties of nature, were, as we have said, for Ruskin the most important things in the world, and he still thought it was through their agency that society was to be saved. On the subject of the arts he found he had as much to teach the rich as the poor. Here all men were equal, and perhaps the artisans whom he taught at the Working Men's College may, in the innocence of their ignorance, have seemed to him to have some advantage over the art student who had been taught all wrong.

He saw things in this order. The contemporary economic structure of society prevented the production of good art. The absence of good art meant that the life of the nation was being cramped and starved.

Later he was to emphasize the material disabilities under which the working class suffered, and put good art in the second place. Even now Ruskin had arrived beyond the point to which what remained of the Chartist movement had retreated. The working class movement in England had become political, and the chief demand was for an extension of the parliamentary franchise. But already, in as far as he turned from the arts at all, Ruskin wanted economic liberty, economic equality, and economic fraternity. He could not see, he said in a lecture at the Working Men's College, why the working class should be all agape for the mighty privilege of having their opinions represented in Parliament. He told them frankly that he very much doubted if they had any opinions to represent. Of course they wanted less work and more wages, but had they formed any idea of how much

lessening of work was possible? Did they suppose that the time would ever come for everybody to have no work and all wages? Had they, in short, planned the permanent state which they wanted England to hold? He ended by saying that their voices 'were not worth a rat's squeak, either in Parliament or out of it,' until they had some ideas to utter with them.

How much politics, the arts, and religion, were entwined in Ruskin's mind, and how much his friends distrusted his judgment in everything except the arts, is well shown in some of the letters of the period.

For instance, when he was in close touch with Acland over the building of the Oxford Museum, we find Ruskin using this old friend as a kind of anvil; he seems indeed to have beaten out many of his more subversive convictions upon the solid resistance of Acland's conservatism. Ruskin writes in April, 1856, to ask rather plaintively why Acland must always be so frightened of what he was going to say next in politics? Their time together at Henley, he goes on, had been rather spoilt by Acland's distrust. Cannot Acland see that he, Ruskin, has a clear methodical head, and has reasoned out a good many principles of general philosophy and political economy by himself? Can Acland not see, above all, that Ruskin is forced along by precisely the same instinct in the consideration of political questions that urges him to examine the laws of architectural or mountain form? He cannot help his interest in politics. The questions suggest themselves, and he is compelled to work them out. Will not Acland believe, too, that he is perfectly honest and disinterested? He does not want power, but is only good-natured and desirous of seeing people about him happy, if he can. Of course he knows he is vain. 'I am *intensely* fond of praise, and very much pained by blame.' But he is here in the excellent position of being a disinterested observer with leisure for inquiry into whatever he wants to know. He

is unconnected with any particular interest or group of persons, and unaffected by feelings of party, of race, of social partialities, or of early prejudice, having been bred a Tory, and gradually developed himself into an indescribable thing – certainly not Tory. Yet he is naturally a Conservative, and loves old things because they are old, and hates new ones because they are new. So will not Acland believe that if he of all people thinks innovation necessary it must be from a very deep sense of conviction? His reforming spirit being 'against the grain of him,' it is therefore to be seen as the result of real intellectual conviction. Finally he appeals to Acland as a man of science, and begs him to consider the qualifications of his friend for political inquiry. There are not very many men so situated. He is rich, he has no ambitions, he has no business interests to bias him, he is used to investigating facts. Will there, on the whole, be a chance of greater good, or evil, accruing to people in general, from the political speculations of such a person?

'Against all these qualifications you will perhaps allege one ugly-looking disqualification. "You live out of the world and cannot know anything about it." ' Ruskin rounds instantly on this imagined criticism. 'Who do you suppose knows most about the Lake of Geneva – I, or the fish in it?'

It seems clear that Carlyle had some hand in this mood of Ruskin's, though it was not till the publication of Ruskin's *Unto This Last* that their association developed from acquaintanceship to friendship. Carlyle, big with his prophetic message, had not yet noticed the possibilities that lurked in the virtuoso. Later he came to see Ruskin as a sort of silver megaphone, an instrument through which his own message could be exquisitely reverberated where Carlyle's growl could not reach – high in the drawing-rooms of Kensington and Grosvenor Square.

The attention with which Ruskin's doings were chronicled

is remarkable. In the spring of 1857, for instance, he affirmed his Low Church principles by sending Mr. Spurgeon £100 towards the building of a Tabernacle. *Punch* professes astonishment, finding it hard to believe that Ruskin is not a Tractarian. However, perhaps it was all as it should be.

> 'To be sure, Ruskin and Calvin are a little at odds, but no man like the author of *The Stones of Venice* can draw so much concord out of a paradox. Under the genius of Mr. Ruskin, the square, cold, lead-lined tank of Calvin would become as vast, as multitudinous, and as phosphorescent as a tropic ocean.'

§ 2

But we shall see no true picture of Ruskin's life at this time, or indeed at any time, if we do not realize him as swept along by the outward circumstances of his life. The tide, if it did not roll him about, was always depositing things at his feet, and Ruskin was always stooping and doing the thing that came to hand. By 1857, for example, the Turner bequests were providing him with a great deal of work.

Turner, as the reader will remember, had died in 1851. His real intention had clearly been to leave the greater part of his money to the setting-up of an institution for 'decayed male artists, of English (legitimate) birth.' His oil pictures to the value of over £20,000, and a fair number of his water-colours and drawings, he had meant for the nation. But the will was confused, and what happened was, first; that his next-of-kin seized upon the money; secondly; that all the pictures, and thousands upon thousands of unarranged, confused, blotted, and often mildewed, drawings, went to the nation; and, thirdly; that nothing at all went to the decayed artists, however legitimate their birth.

It had certainly been Turner's wish that Ruskin should have a voice in the guardianship of his pictures, about whose hanging he had left very particular directions. So in December, 1856, we find Ruskin writing to Lord Palmerston and offering to catalogue and arrange the mass of crumpled and smudgy water-colours.

Ruskin began the work of arranging these Turner sketches early in 1857, and worked on them for the next fourteen or fifteen months. It was a most difficult piece of work. The drawings had been inadequately fixed, the paper of the water-colours was as tender as blotting-paper, often two sketches would be on the back and front of the same mildewed piece. The mocking old man, either in carelessness or closeness, had put every possible difficulty in the way of his disciple. It was impossible to save them all, and all but impossible to arrange the ones saved, in any order of subject or chronology.

A tradition exists, however, that though Ruskin's work appeared to be exemplary, he betrayed his trust in one particular. Turner had, of course, been very fond of representing sea scenes, and there were said to have been among the water-colours some Hogarthian subjects – seamen's lodging-houses, brothels, and the like. These Ruskin is said to have deliberately destroyed. Of this probable legend, however, there is, as far as the writer is aware, no confirmation. What is certain is that he worked hard and long, and found the work very trying and exhausting. This was partly because he did not get on very well with the professional curator, and partly because he started on an ambitious chronological scheme.

He was helped in the work by George Allen, a man who was to play quite a considerable part in his life. Allen had begun his career as a joiner, and then, as has been said, become Ruskin's pupil at the Working Men's College. George Allen was to become later the founder of the present

publishing firm of Allen & Unwin, and was for long Ruskin's only printer, publisher, and distributor.

§ 3

The same year saw the beginning of what turned out rather a pleasant friendship between the Brownings and Ruskin. They had been introduced by Miss Mitford in 1854. Ruskin was a quite admirable letter-writer, and so were both the Brownings, and a good interchange took place – Ruskin of course giving them infinite advice about how to write poetry, though in the next breath saying that he thought *Aurora Leigh* the greatest poem in the English language, and unsurpassed by anything but Shakespeare. The Brownings, though they admired Ruskin, were by no means uncritical, and Robert Browning seems to have come as near to laughing at him as anyone.

Another acquaintanceship made two years later, in 1858, was much more momentous. The Lady Waterford of the day was Ruskin's pupil in water-colour drawing; and in her acquaintance Fate lay in ambush, for it was through her that he met an Irishwoman, the wife of a banker, a certain Mrs. La Touche of Harristown, Kildare.

Mrs. La Touche, a handsome, cultivated woman of vigorous character, had a family, and particularly two daughters, who she believed had talent. She was also, like everyone else, very anxious to meet Mr. Ruskin. One day in 1858 Lady Waterford brought her to Denmark Hill. With her Mrs. La Touche brought her little girl of nine.

This child, whose name was Rose, was neither tall nor short, but a little stiff and quiet. Her eyes were blue, and her lips, though lovely in profile, are said to have been a little too wide and hard at the edge. But her hair was soft, unusually soft, and exquisitely blonde, and lay beautifully round her neck.

She and her mother both seemed to like the Turners and their owner. It seemed that they always spent some part of the year in London, and Mrs. La Touche, anxious, she said, about her talented daughters, begged Ruskin to come and see them there sometimes, and made him free of their schoolroom. He often came, much to their mother's pride and content; but after the novelty wore off, the children thought him a bore. It is recorded of Rose that she in particular thought him very ugly. She had heard so much of the great man, that she expected him to look like Garibaldi, whereas all she saw was a thin, rather dried-up gentleman of forty, with sandy hair and a rolling voice with a queer Scotch burr in it which sounded harsh to her.

Love is not to be played with. We cannot always be sublime. Ruskin with his first passion had pitched his note too high. It was not merely tragic, it was also ridiculous, that it should be his fate later on to love this child, thirty years younger than himself, even more passionately than he had loved the lost Adèle-Clotilde.

At first the acquaintanceship gave him great pleasure, for Rose's baby charms were still innocuous.

§ 4

The summer of 1858 passed in a busy tranquillity. There were visits at Denmark Hill from his charming female disciples, or Ruskin would drive down to London to visit his protégées of the studio. It was in a cheerful mood that he set out that autumn on a Tour.

This time, except for the inevitable valet and for Couttet, he went alone. It is delightful to record that for once he made use of his freedom. He actually broke the Sabbath, and later – deliberately leaving the mountains – gave himself the pale but delightful ghost of a 'good time' in a city. He tells the story in *Præterita*.

Ruskin had been up in the mountains, and staying at the little town of Bellinzona, living hard, reading little except Greek, and drawing with rather ill success. Suddenly he had got tired of it all, packed his bags, and set out for Turin, where there were 'military bands, nice-dressed people, and shops with something inside.' There were (besides a good hotel) Paul Veroneses in the Royal Gallery, a nice little opera-house, 'and any quantity of marching and manœuvring by the best troops in Italy, with perfect . . . bands and beautiful tossing plumes, and pretty ladies to look on.' He spent a hundred pounds on grapes, partridges, and the opera. Full of his new discovery of worldliness, he attended a languid and gloomy service at a little Protestant chapel. Here the preacher disgusted him by denouncing the wicked city of Turin, and by proclaiming the 'exclusive favour with God of the two dozen members of his congregation.' Ruskin pranced impatiently out. Paul Veronese's *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*, seen to the strains of a military band outside the palace, confirmed him in his impatience with the minister. He felt that his mother's faith held him no longer.

CHAPTER XIX

1859–1860: Aged 40–41

PROGRESS?

'Que l'admiration de la Beauté ait été en effet l'acte perpétuel de la vie de Ruskin, cela peut-être vrai à la lettre; mais j'estime que le bût de cette vie, son intension profonde, secrete, et constante, était autre.'

Marcel Proust

§ 1

Alice meynell, in the preface to her book of Ruskin extracts, says that he led an unhappy life because he could not perfectly renounce the world, deny himself, and submit himself, and all men, to the will of God. There was certainly a veil of compromise over everything he did. The military bands, the Sabbath-breaking and the partridges of Turin, certainly did him no lasting good; it was not long before a mood of disillusionment seems to have set in.

From now onwards many of Ruskin's best letters were addressed to Professor Charles Eliot Norton, the Bostonian, with whom he had made friends. Norton had had very much the same sort of Puritan bringing up as Ruskin, and was besides soaked in the culture that has made such families as the Lowells and Jameses famous. Characteristically, the American was much more of a European than Ruskin. Cultivated, receptive, and a great collector of knowledge and persons, Norton was all on the side of good sense. He was shocked by the wilder, madder side of both Carlyle and Ruskin, but was at the same time too shrewd, and too truthful, an observer not to admit it. His was always a steadying influence, and the clarity of his perceptions stands in great

contrast to the blindness of many members of Ruskin's circle. He was indeed a great admirer, who never seems to have drifted into discipleship, but kept Ruskin in order. He was a neat, round, learned, sensitive little man, and a very good example of a famous type.

Ruskin writes to him in the winter of 1859 a letter which shows the state of restlessness and discontent in full working order – the growth of Ruskin's inability to select is becoming a torment. He is writing, as usual, half in joke and half in earnest.

> 'I am tormented by what I cannot get said, nor done. I want to get all the Titians, Tintorets, Paul Veroneses, Turners, and Sir Joshuas in the world into one great fireproof Gothic gallery of marble and serpentine. I want to get them all perfectly engraved. I want to go and draw all the subjects of Turner's 19,000 sketches in Switzerland and Italy, elaborated by myself. I want to get everybody a dinner who hasn't got one; I want– to macadamize some new roads to heaven with broken fools'-heads. I want to hang up some knaves out of the way, not that I've any dislike to them, but I think it would be wholesome for them, and for other people, and that they would make good crows' meat. I want to play all day long and arrange my cabinet of minerals with new white wool. I want somebody to amuse me when I'm tired. I want Turner's pictures not to fade. I want to be able to draw clouds, and to understand how they go, and I can't make them stand still, nor understand them – they all go sideways. . . . Farther, I want to make the Italians industrious, the Americans quiet, the Swiss romantic, the Roman Catholics rational, and the English Parliament honest – and I can't do anything and don't understand what I was born for. I get melancholy – overeat myself, oversleep

> myself – get pains in the back – don't know what to do in any wise. . . . P.S. – I want also to give lectures in all the manufacturing towns, and to write an essay on poetry, and to teach some masters of schools to draw; and I want to be perfectly quiet and undisturbed and not to think, and to draw, myself, all day long, till I can draw better; and I want to make a dear High Church friend of mine sit under Mr. Spurgeon.'

This mood he expressed freely also to Mrs. Browning. She was very kind, tried to cheer him up, assured him it was all due to the hard work on *Modern Painters*, and generally called the mood 'languor after victory.'

Already in January, 1859, he had begun complaining to her, as he complained ten months later to Norton, that he was constantly 'seized with great fits of vexation.' He doubts the vocation that had seemed so unquestionable in 1854. He thinks his proper business is not that of writing. He declares peevishly and untruthfully that he never wants to utter his own delight; but does it out of benevolence – 'miserable benevolence.' 'For my own pleasure I should be collecting stones and mosses, drying and ticketing them, reading scientific books, walking all day long in the summer, going to plays and what-not in winter – never writing or saying a word. . . .' But how can he indulge himself like that, he goes on, with all this 'terrific absurdity and wrong going on?' His voice rises to a sort of eloquent shriek as his sense of humour and his sense of grievance strive together.

> 'I live the life of an old lady in a houseful of wicked children. But people were meant to be able to give quiet pieces of advice to each other and show, without any advice, how things should be done properly (such as they had gift and liking for). But people were never meant to be always howling and bawling the right road to a generation of drunken cabmen, their heads up

through the trapdoor of the hansom, faces all over mud – no right road to be got gone upon after all – nothing but a drunken effort at turning, ending in ditch. I hope to get just one more howl executed, from which I hope great effects – upon the Moon – and then, see if I don't take to Kennel and Straw, comfortably.'

All through that year (1859) Ruskin's attitude seems to have been changing and hardening – his charming life in London and all his friendships notwithstanding. He could no longer be beguiled by all the company of the elect that gathered in London. Not Tennyson, not Thackeray, not G. F. Watts, nor Frederick Maurice, nor the young Burne-Joneses, nor the Rossettis, could console Ruskin. Yet each of them had a patent recipe for ignoring a world that selfish industrialism was making intolerable to sensitive people. But none of them, with all their charm and their marvellous assortment of blinkers, could enable him to shut out reality. Was it the effect of the Working Men's College? Was it the fact that, unlike the painters, who only sent their pictures there, Ruskin had actually travelled to most of the manufacturing cities of Great Britain? Was it the friendship of Carlyle, or the fact that he loved facts? It is impossible to say. Anyhow, Ruskin's feelings were undergoing a slow, uncomfortable change. Gothic and the Middle Ages, on the one hand, and Calvinism on the other, were alike ceasing to please. Ruskin was turning his mind toward economics.

'You are almost the only friend I have left (he writes to Charles Eliot Norton in August, 1859). I mean the only friend who understands or feels with me. I've a good many Radical half-friends, but I'm not a Radical and they quarrel with me – by the way, so do you a little – about my governing schemes. Then all my Tory friends think me worse than Robespierre. Rossetti and the P.R.B. are all gone crazy about the

> Morte d'Arthur. I don't believe in Evangelicalism – and my Evangelical (once) friends now look upon me with as much horror as on one of the possessed Gennesaret pigs. Nor do I believe in the Pope – and some Roman Catholic friends, who had great hopes of me, think I ought to be burned. Domestically, I am supposed worse than Blue Beard; artistically, I am considered a mere packet of squibs and crackers. . . . Some day when I've quite made up my mind what to fight for, or whom to fight, I shall do well enough, if I live, but I haven't made up my mind what to fight for – whether, for instance, people ought to live in Swiss cottages and sit on three-legged and one-legged stools; whether people ought to dress well or ill; whether ladies ought to tie their hair in beautiful knots; whether Commerce or Business of any kind be an invention of the Devil or not; whether Art is a Crime or only an Absurdity; whether Clergymen ought to be multiplied, or exterminated by arsenic, like rats; whether in general we are getting on, and if so where we are going to; whether it is worth while to ascertain any of these things; whether one's tongue was ever made to talk with or only to taste with.'

To some extent Mrs. Browning was right and the mood can be accounted for by the effort of finishing *Modern Painters*. He was working on it against the grain and to please his father. He writes to Lowell in the December of this year:

> 'I am in a querulous and restless state – what head I have nearly turned, or turned at least in the sense in which the cook predicts it of our cream when she cannot get any butter. I can get no butter at present . . . being on the whole vacantly puzzled and paralysed, able only to write a little now and then of old thoughts, to finish *Modern Painters*, which must be finished.

> Whenever I can write at all this winter I must take up that, for it is tormenting me, always about my neck. . . . It is giving me more trouble than I can well stand, and I cannot do anything else till it is out of the way.'

Ruskin, now his religion had failed him, had begun to read John Stuart Mill and Adam Smith. He had long, as he afterwards told,[1] contrasted 'the luxury and continual opportunity' of his own life, with the 'poverty and captivity' of his cousins, the sons and daughters of the Perth tanner and the Croydon baker. These cousins were, he alleges with his usual touch of exaggeration, the only creatures whom he had to care for beyond his home, and they were each and all ending or spending their youth in an economic prison. There was no liberty for them, they had to earn their living in the first way that turned up. There was no question of using their special talents, if they had any. 'If my heart was cold to them,' he goes on with characteristic honesty, 'my mind was often sad for them.'

He had as a critic of painting and architecture, for long seen society from the point of view of the product, rather than of the producer. He had found that the line of conduct prescribed by the classical economists was ruining the sort of product which he understood. Pictures, architecture, furniture, and silver, were all the worse for the theory of selling dear, and buying cheap, which was supposed to unlock the doors of prosperity. Neither, then, among the people Ruskin knew, nor in the type of production which he understood – the production of works of art of all kinds – did the precepts of these classical economists work.

If every man sold as dearly as he could, and bought as cheaply as he could, and in each case bargained as far as possible to his sole advantage, the highest good would be

[1] *Præterita.*

obtained for the greatest number. That was the comfortable doctrine. But in Ruskin's own experience, cruelty, servility, penury, and snobbery, actually resulted. With experience, and Carlyle to egg him on, he had then begun to doubt the validity of the whole economic structure of the life round him. He went on to read the theory on which that economic life was based, or – as we might say to-day – the theory with which an instinctive society had sought to rationalize and justify the course of action which it meant to pursue.

§ 2

In the March of 1860 Ruskin was called upon to give evidence before a Committee of the House of Commons – a Committee whose most illustrious member was Sir Robert Peel. His evidence and the attitude of the Committee give an excellent picture of the contemporary relations of the classes. The work of the Committee was to see if the usefulness of public institutions, such as galleries and libraries, could be improved. From the questions which they put when they examined their witness, it seems that they believed that those whom they always alluded to as 'the lower orders,' or 'workmen,' might have some claim to an occasional view of the nation's possessions.

Ruskin, in giving his evidence, was quite as ready as they to admit the fact of a rigid class separation, and remarked several times upon the greater *gêne* that existed in England between the classes than was found on the Continent. In England, he declared, the 'workman' was often so much ashamed of his bad clothes as to be unwilling to go to see museums or pictures at all.

It was before this Committee that Ruskin seems first to have made use of an expression which has since become a slogan of the British Labour Party: 'The workman ought to

desire to rise *in* his own class, not out of it.' The Committee want to know if in Mr. Ruskin's opinion the masses are anxious for self-improvement. He answers, yes, they are thirsty for knowledge, but adds a sad rider to that:

> 'I find that with an ordinary constitution the labour of a day in England oppresses a man, and breaks him down, and it is not refreshment to him to use his mind after that . . . his mind is languid with labour.'

He is asked his opinion about the attitude of the classes to one another, and says that he notes 'an increased kindness of the upper towards the lower.' And does not Mr. Ruskin think, asks a Committee man, with the correct Victorian belief in progress, that the lower orders have improved in the last twelve years? Ruskin will not have it. 'No, while greater efforts are made to help the workmen, the principles on which our commerce is conducted are every day oppressing him and sinking him deeper.'

Here the chairman interposes with the remark that he is sure that Ruskin did not intend to cast a slur upon competition?

'Yes, very distinctly,' he answers; 'I intended not only to cast a slur, but to express my excessive horror of the principle of competition in every way.'

Ruskin finishes his evidence with a touching phrase. The Committee have been completely baffled by his attitude, and they finally ask him what he does want done, in a cultural way, for these Lower Orders? Ruskin says that they would soon understand if they would suppose that 'the workman' is son to one of them, that he has no means of rising into another class. They are to imagine that the life of a manual worker is to be made such as should be lived by one of their children.

Here for the first time we hear Ruskin speaking clearly with his new voice, and asking why the wealth of England

was fairy gold. Carlyle, Ruskin's teacher in prophecy, had asked the same question a dozen years before.

> [1] 'With unabated bounty the land of England blooms and grows, waving with yellow harvests, thick-studded with workshops, with fifteen millions of workers, understood to be the strongest and cunningest and willingest our earth ever had . . . of these successful, skilful workers some two millions, it is now counted, sit in workhouses . . . in workhouses, pleasantly so-called, because work cannot be done in them. They sit there . . . their cunning right hand lamed, lying idle in their sorrowful bosom; their hopes, outlooks, share of this fair world, shut in by narrow walls. They sit there, penned up, as in a kind of horrid enchantment; glad to be imprisoned and enchanted, that they may not perish, starved.'

It is one of the eccentricities of collections of human beings that what they will take from one man they will not tolerate from another. Nothing could be more 'Left' than some of the burning rhetoric of *Past and Present*, or than the invective of *Latterday Pamphlets*. But where Carlyle might steal the horse, Ruskin, it seemed, must not look over the wall. Ruskin's excursion into this field was to be bitterly resented.

It seems almost certain that he did not realize the storm which would be raised. It was he who suggested to Smith & Elder, and to Thackeray, who was then editing their *Cornhill Magazine*, that they might care to have some essays on political economy from his pen. The *Cornhill* was new, and its editor and the proprietors were delighted at the suggestion, for Mr. Ruskin's name was enough to sell any periodical at that time.

Sitting in his study at Denmark Hill, lined with Turner

[1] Carlyle's *Past and Present*.

water-colours, or in a pine-panelled room in an inn in Switzerland, with a snow mountain and a lake to glance at through the window, Ruskin, almost without knowing it, crossed the Rubicon, and ceased for a while to be accounted a respectable member of society. If there were fears in his heart as his pen traced the vigorous opening chapters of *Unto This Last*, they were fears not of blows to his own vanity, but of giving pain to his father.

His father had opened his heart to him: he understood very well what had been the disappointments in the life of a man who was now old. Only a new aloofness, only a growing critical sense of a certain bluntness, a certain superficiality, and a certain selfishness which had marked James Ruskin's actions could have nerved Ruskin to write what he knew would give the old man pain. For he thoroughly comprehended the pathos of his father's career, and sympathized with the good qualities, and the timidities and weaknesses, which had led up to the disappointments of his life.

CHAPTER XX

1860–1861: Aged 41–42

'THERE IS NO WEALTH BUT LIFE'

'The reason why the educated and cultured classes in this country found Ruskin incredible was that they could not bring themselves to believe that he meant what he was saying, and indeed shouting. . . . They had been brought up from their earliest childhood as above all respectable people . . . they were suddenly confronted with a violently contrary view. They were unable to take it in.'

Bernard Shaw

§ 1

In *Unto This Last* Ruskin calls in question the truth of a large body of current economic doctrine. This might have passed, had he not also brought out the social consequences of these doctrines in a way that was both new and unpleasant. He was an expert on snobbery, and here he related the snobbery that he observed in mid-Victorian society to the economic doctrines which underlay it. He expressed current classical economics in a social way, which made their incompatibility with Christianity apparent.

He takes, for instance, the notable current contempt for 'trade.' Trade, however much lauded by the economists, stood very low in the drawing-rooms of London which Ruskin knew so well. It was socially respectable to be a lawyer, a parson, or a soldier, but society preferred that you should not be 'in trade.'

[1] 'The essential reason for such preference will be found to lie in the fact that the merchant is presumed to act

[1] *Unto This Last.*

always selfishly. His work may be necessary to the community, but the motive of it is understood to be wholly personal. The merchant's first object in all his dealings must be (the public believe) to get as much for himself and leave as little for his neighbour (or customer) as possible.'

This attitude, Ruskin goes on, is enforced upon the merchant by public statute, and recommended to him on all occasions. 'It is vociferously proclaimed for a law of the universe that a buyer's function is to cheapen and a seller's is to cheat.'

But the public, in spite of endorsing this view, immediately turns round and, in its capacity as 'society,' condemns the man of commerce for his compliance with their own analysis of the situation. It is, says Ruskin, because he only performs his services to the community as a by-product, in the course of his search for private advantage, that they instinctively stamp him as belonging to an inferior grade of humanity. The merchant, then, is a social martyr to the current low view of his function.

After this preamble, Ruskin, getting back to more usual ground, asks what are the economic consequences of this praised yet unpopular line of conduct? He traces them out in the case where the commodity to be bought is a man's labour.

He sees before him in every such transaction a chain of men. If, he says, in pursuance of the rules of the current economic theory, the man at the top of the chain pays the minimum price to the man immediately below him, he will have a surplus left on his hands. With this surplus, points out the classical economist, he will be able to employ another man at the minimum price. This Ruskin admits. The supposition that he combats is the one that follows – that is, that, in the accumulation of this surplus, a saving has been

made. For supposing employer No. 1 paid, not the minimum price to the man whom he hired, but what Ruskin calls the just price, then the surplus (the money which he has 'wasted' by paying more than he had to pay) has not ceased to exist, but has passed into the hands of the man to whom the 'just' price has been paid.

And how will this man, No. 2, employ the surplus that he has got through the high wages policy of No. 1? Ruskin sees that No. 2 will spend it in the purchase either of goods or service – that is, by directly or indirectly employing a third man. Therefore, as far as numbers of men employed is concerned, the fact that at such high wages, No. 1 can only employ a single workman, does not matter at all. High wages, Ruskin argues, are not a cause of unemployment. They are only a cause of a lessened expenditure on luxuries.

> 'In the last case one man works for the first hirer, one for the person hired, and so on down, or up, through the various grades of service, the influence (or wealth) being carried forward by justice, and arrested by injustice. . . . The influence of justice is to distribute the power of wealth through a chain of men. . . . Thus the power of wealth in the acquisition of luxury is diminished.'

Ruskin seems rather to suggest that this argument is original, and it is indeed quite probable that he thought it out for himself. But actually Robert Owen, in his letter to British Master-Manufacturers, had already expressed the same thought in more general terms – namely, that the saving of an employer on his wages bill is, from the point of view of the community, not a saving at all.

> [1] 'No evil (writes Owen) ought to be more dreaded by a master-manufacturer than the low wages of labour.

[1] G. D. H. Cole, *Robert Owen*.

> . . . These (the labourers), in consequence of their numbers, are the greatest consumers of all articles, and it will always be found that when wages are high the country prospers; when they are low, all classes suffer, from the highest to the lowest, but more particularly the manufacturing interest.'

Ruskin has a firm grasp of the 'Iron Law of Wages' theory and sets it out well.

One of the chief attacks in *Unto This Last* is upon the concept, 'Economic Man.' It seems a little difficult at first to reconcile Ruskin's affirmation of the widespread social and cultural consequences of economic facts and beliefs, with his equally emphatic denial of the existence of this imaginary being.

But 'Economic Man' as he appeared in 1860 was a very crude creation: it was not till he had been grouped, and then split into two groups of 'economic men,' that he became a valuable hypothesis.

Unless Ruskin had been capable of inventing the materialist conception of history and the theory of the opposed interests of classes, he could have no means of seeing how much 'Economic Man' was capable of being furbished up. He might have read the Communist Manifesto and some of Karl Marx's articles, which between 1856 and 1857 were being published by David Urquhart in his *Free Press*; but he almost certainly did not do so. As for *Das Kapital*, it still lay on a desk under the hand of its maker, in the reading-room of the British Museum.

In the form, then, in which Ruskin read it, the theory of 'Economic Man' was certainly one at which common sense was bound to boggle. He was held to be a creature who always acted rationally, and always knew what was good for him: above all, his individual interests were held never to clash with the general interests of the community. The in-

voluntary, chaotic, predatory nature of economic motivation had not been made clear. If we remember this element of triteness and superficiality in the classical view, we shall see why Ruskin so much objected to it.

One point in economics which Ruskin seems to have worked out for himself was, as has been said, the iron law of wages. He alienated many of his 'advanced' philanthropic friends by mocking, like a Marxian, at some of their favourite remedies for poverty. He considered, for instance, the remission of taxation, or the repeal of the Corn Laws, as quite indifferent and of no importance. He pointed out that if the workman were freed from all taxes, under the present system his wages would be less by just that sum. Competition would still reduce them to subsistence level.

§ 2

Ruskin put up an alternative to Economic Man. He suggested a being whom we might call 'organic man,' a social animal, whose skill of brain and hand is his fortune, and whose 'vital satisfaction' is the only criterion of wealth.

'There is no wealth but life,' he argues, and pleads eloquently against the Midas conception of prosperity where a stagnant wealth piles up, and where men perish with their vital needs unsatisfied.

But unfortunately Ruskin too often in his economic writing or acting does not leave it at that. He is apt to drag in morality and æsthetics. He is too apt to go on to define 'vital satisfaction' as meaning, not what people do in fact want or desire, but what they *ought* to want or desire.

This sort of argument is fundamental in Ruskin. His mother's moral concepts lay deep and heavy on his heart. Whatever he may be doing or saying, sooner or later a bubble from this thick, dark morality rises to the surface. Much less reprehensible, at this stage at least, was his ten-

dency to branch out and away from the main stem of his argument.

It was natural to Ruskin always to trace out the more delicate and intimate consequences of his economics or æsthetics, and the habit only became a vice when he could no longer control it. Ruskin had in many respects a feminine mind. That is not to say that he had only feelings and no mind at all. But one chief characteristic of the feminine mind seems to be that it is vitally aware of the fact that life, and all the subjects of knowledge, form a continuum. Interdependences, the flow of the generations, the uselessness of this, without that, the dependence of that on the other, these are the facts that look large to it. But in analysis, as against creation, a male blindness and deafness is absolutely necessary. For purposes of study and exposition things must be arbitrarily separated that are really closely interwoven and entangled. This violence Ruskin could seldom bring himself to do. He never had the quality which his contemporary Matthew Arnold postulates of the male – 'a will like a dividing spear.' Ruskin saw only too clearly that a discussion of the satisfaction of desires was bound up with the question of what desires ought to be satisfied. He was aware that nobody does separate them in practice: he knew that all mankind has necessarily had to adopt a different attitude to desire for a dozen bottles of raw spirit, and for a dozen bottles of new milk. So he mixed up arguments about the best use of wealth, with his economics, and arguments about truth, with his æsthetics. The result, in both cases, is that his work is brilliant, vital, and disappointing. If he was only going to hint and glance, the reader feels that he should have cast his work in a creative form.

He should have known that for the purpose of analysis it was essential that he should not listen to the insidious voice of common sense. But the circumstances of his life had made too heavily against his knowing how to mark off his subjects.

He never had a chance of working in association with other people, he never was so placed as to learn to say to himself, 'This is relevant, but it comes into my colleague's domain.' We shall see that as he grew older Ruskin got worse. The long fibres and roots with which every subject that he touched embrace and involve every other subject seemed to him less and less separable. He grew less and less able to use violence and make a clean edge. When he has set himself to discuss the growth of crystals he finds himself dealing with education, or with the place of art and nature in common life, or with the right attitude to religion.

It is a pity that he never seriously attempted to carry out the task of translating wealth into its vital values, into human costs and human satisfactions. He lays it all out and announces his intention of getting to work, but invariably some allied subject lures him off from it. But he must be taken as he is, and we can plead in extenuation that if he never argued his theory of vital economics to the end, he could write of it with passion.

> 'A great cry (he writes) rises from all our manufacturing cities, louder than their furnace blasts. . . . We manufacture everything there except men. We blanch cotton, and strengthen steel, and refine sugar, and shape pottery; but to brighten, to strengthen, to refine, or to form, a single living spirit, never enters into our estimate of advantages.'

§ 3

Now this passage is not, as the reader might suppose, quoted from *Unto This Last*, but from *Stones of Venice*. There is nothing more inflammatory in *Unto This Last*: all is sad and reasonable. He attacks competition, *Laissez Faire*, in so many words, that is all. He had used far more in-

vective before. But up till now the foil of economic invective had been made harmless by the button of an æsthetic application. Now the button was off and the point revealed.

The scandal, outrage, and tumult which was caused by this essentially mild book was extreme. Read the newspaper attacks upon him, and it seems impossible that Ruskin had not married two wives, stolen money out of the poor-box, or been involved in an Oscar Wilde scandal. Such indignation about doubts expressed of the workings of the laws of supply and demand is almost incomprehensible, unless we are ready to agree with Marx that nothing matters to a class except its means of subsistence. The contemporary Press outdid itself in abuse of Ruskin, who formerly could do no wrong. His economic essays were called 'intolerable twaddle,' and the author 'a perfect paragon of blubbering.' This particular critic went on, with exquisite lack of humour, to style his own willingness to argue with a man like Mr. Ruskin, 'who can only write in a scream,' as a condescension. His way of writing of the rich and poor was called 'impulsive.' Finally, another paper declared that 'the world is not going to be preached to death by a mad governess.'

After three of the essays had been published, the *Cornhill Magazine* bowed before the storm: *Unto This Last* was seen to be 'too deeply tainted with Socialistic heresy to conciliate subscribers'; and Thackeray wrote apologetically to Ruskin, to say that he dared publish no more.

Ruskin, out in Switzerland, his magazine public thus suddenly snatched away, came to a pause. He says of himself that he never could bear to write without an audience. In this case he had proposed a magazine audience to himself. So, although he seems always to have meant to republish in book form, the stopping of the *Cornhill* series seems to have balked him, so that in the end he allowed *Unto This Last* to remain a fragment.

§ 4

A set-off, however, to the severe newspaper criticism which Ruskin had to face for the first time, was the change in Carlyle's attitude. Ruskin had long been a great admirer of his; but, as has been said, it had not been very clear what Carlyle had thought of Ruskin. Froude says Carlyle had scarcely noticed him, while Mr. Wilson hints that Carlyle found Ruskin a flimsy fellow and a bore. But when these essays appeared, Carlyle began – in Froude's words – 'to examine him more carefully.'

> [1] 'He saw, as he that looked could not help seeing, that here was a true man of genius, peculiar, uneven, passionate, but wielding in his hand real levin bolts, fiery arrows which pierced to the quick.'

However, when the first papers came out (in August and September), Ruskin was still in Switzerland, so the *rapprochement* could not take place till they were all back in London for the winter. But though they could not meet on the new terms, Carlyle wrote Ruskin a characteristic letter.

> 'You go down through those unfortunate dismal science people like a treble X of Senna, Glauber and Aloes; like a fit of British cholera threatening to be fatal! I have read with exhilaration, exultation, often with laughter, with bravissimo . . . I marvel in parts at the lynx-eyed sharpness of your logic, at the pincer-grip (red-hot pincers) you take of certain bloated cheeks and blown-up bellies. More power to your elbow, though it is cruel in the extreme.'

[1] *Carlyle at His Zenith*, Wilson.

§ 5

Ruskin's absence abroad led to a queer situation. These political essays, like his other work, when he was away from London, all went through the hands of his father; and we find old James Ruskin writing to a friend, with pride: 'Early in July John sent me from abroad his first paper, kindly saying I might suppress it if the publishing would annoy me.' But James backed his son this time, and sent the first MS. on to Smith, remarking that he thought them the twelve most important pages he had ever read.

His father's attitude must have been a relief to Ruskin. Or was it secretly a disappointment? Did he perhaps feel uneasily and without formulating the feeling, that with all this fuss and commotion one more fuss and commotion would not have been too much. Did he feel that here were public grounds on which he and his parents could have differed and even parted without the squalour of a private quarrel?

But no such clean edge was to be made. Ruskin came home as usual to his parents' house, and almost as soon as he was back his mother fell downstairs and broke her thigh. Ruskin was at once, as ever, all attention and duty. However, he did go so far as to grumble to his friends at having to read aloud to her, for she would choose 'the worst possible Evangelical theology,' and was too ill for Ruskin to make disparaging remarks.

In the same letter he speaks of his father as 'recovering from the shock' which his wife's accident caused him, and contemplating his son's '*Cornhill* gambols' with a 'terrified complacency which is quite touching.' As for himself, Ruskin adds that he is 'still very poorly – philanthropy not agreeing with me.'

To C. E. Norton, Ruskin writes in an amusing letter about the fury he feels at the conduct of Dukes, Crown

Princes and such-like persons; and of his remedy for that sensation, which is to go to the British Museum and look at stuffed penguins till he feels cool.

This winter he saw a good deal of Carlyle. They soon took to meeting as a regular thing every Wednesday evening, and Carlyle went to hear him lecture at the Royal Institution on Tree-twigs. This was the first of Ruskin's lectures which was a failure. The lecture, in Carlyle's words, 'was generally accounted to have broken down,' though Carlyle himself says that he liked it and found it far better than many a neater thing. But Ruskin had enough of the sense of the stage to realize his ill-success, and enough sensibility to be shocked by it. He resolved as usual to go abroad again, and in the middle of June, 1861, he went to Boulogne. There, wonderful to say, he took a seven weeks' rest, spending much of his time in going out with the fishing fleet, and watching the sea. Religion and Political Economy were vexing, both of them; he did not want to think of Denmark Hill. It was best to talk to the fishermen, or to think of that dear little Rose la Touche who was so fresh, and intelligent, and sweet, and wrote him such pretty letters.

CHAPTER XXI

1861–1863 : Aged 42–44

ROSE; A TYPICAL JOURNEY

§ 1

The unsuccessful publication of *Unto This Last* ended this short time of comparative happiness. His restlessness and melancholy increased. The howling down of his essays convinced even Ruskin's singularly innocent mind that neither in art nor politics is it enough, as he had supposed, to show people 'the right road.'

When he wrote *Unto This Last* he thought that his political writings would be respectfully received, and even hoped his ideas might possibly be taken up by some political group. This illusion had now been corrected. But this disappointment was not the only dark thread that was being woven into his life at this time. Two more troubles made him uneasy.

His religious feeling was changing in a way that affected his life uncomfortably. In the August of 1861, for instance, he paid a round of visits, and went, among other places, to Ireland, to stay with the La Touches, and see his beloved Rosie. Here, in the square bleak house at Harristown, he not only confessed his lack of faith to Mrs. La Touche, but said he meant to express it just as he had his new political views. Mrs. La Touche was a conventional Churchwoman, and she was terribly shocked by this. It was probably by the

threat of not letting him see her children if he publicly declared himself an atheist that she got Ruskin to promise to wait ten years before he said anything in print. But the sense of his loss of faith was there, and it was aggravated by a silence which was unnatural in Ruskin.

Thirdly, as will be shown in his own words, Ruskin had by the early 1860's completely realized the falseness of his position at home, and the hollowness of the relationship with his parents on which he had staked so much.

These three sources of unhappiness acted as a kind of scourge to the poor man, and for several years drove him hither and thither like an agitated spinning-top across Europe and back again. If the spectacle of these uncomfortable, futile, never-ending journeys were not pathetic it would be highly absurd. Was it to be spent by his son on thus posting up and down, that James Ruskin had laid by so much in Billiter Street?

It becomes quite difficult for reader or biographer to follow the courses of all these journeys, and almost impossible to believe that any merely inner compulsion to restlessness could have whipped him on to so much physical discomfort. If the reader cares to turn to the chronological table at the end of the book he will be struck at once by the rapid alternations of place. In June, 1861, Ruskin is in Boulogne, then he is staying in the north of England at Winnington Hall (a girls' school kept by a Miss Bell, of which we shall hear more), then he is in Ireland, at Harristown, staying with the La Touches. He goes back to London: during October he is both at Lucerne and Mornex, in the winter he is back again at Denmark Hill. In May, 1862, he is in Milan, thence he goes to Geneva. August finds him settled at Mornex; in November he is back at Denmark Hill again, and by Christmas once more in Switzerland. The next year 1863, is passed in much the same way – half of it on the road. For we must be careful not to imagine a Blue Train.

The journey from London to Milan often took Ruskin ten days, and could hardly take him less than a week. These transits were, it is true, made as comfortable as possible. He always had at least two servants with him; the trains were not very good, but part of the journey was still by carriage; and he invariably had the best rooms, including a private sitting-room, at the inns at which he stayed. But even so, this purposeless flitting and fluttering, cannot be accounted for except by a deep perturbation.

However, he did not recant his political theories. During the restless winter of 1861 he began passing *Unto This Last* for book publication, and preparing a fresh series of essays on political economy.

Froude was then editor of *Frazer's Magazine*, and had promised to publish them. Froude, as one of Carlyle's principal disciples, no doubt felt bound, if he could, to give Ruskin a platform, and he seems to have imagined, moreover, that the public of *Frazer's Magazine* were more accustomed to Radical thought than Thackeray's.

He was soon to test the truth of this supposition, with what result we shall see.

§ 2

Ruskin thought he could write best in Switzerland, and went to Lucerne. From there he prospected some of the higher villages and small towns in the Savoy Alps, and finally fixed upon lodgings at Mornex, on the slopes of the Salève, where he had a view of Mont Blanc.

It was a simple place. He describes the house as being 'at the end of all carriage roads, with green chairs, a deal floor, and peace.' Peace for most people, but not for Ruskin, for no sooner is his retreat found than he goes posting back to Denmark Hill.

Through all these lonely journeyings he had (besides his

work of revision) been copying out lists in his note-books of Greek words. He classified them under parts of speech, under 'myths,' or under natural history. These studies were the foundations for the classical allusions that make *Munera Pulveris* such hard reading. His head was full of symbols and of musings over these Greeks, who had not been afraid of love or happiness. In and out among the Greek verbs flitted thoughts of his own childhood and the image of Rose La Touche, then aged fourteen. He was always harking back to that, always writing to her and hoping for one of the frequent joint letters from mother and daughter.

Rose had been ill in November, and he writes to his father about her from Lucerne, a letter whose tone is decidedly defensive.

> 'Rose's illness has assuredly *nothing* to do with any regard she may have for me. She likes me to pet her, but it is no manner of trouble when I go away, her affection takes much more the form of a desire to please me and make me happy in any way she can, than of any want for herself, either of my letters or my company.'

Ruskin was over forty, Rosie was fourteen – Ruskin was simply experimenting in education. Perhaps it was really in Mrs. La Touche that he was interested. But looking back he had put thoughts of Rosie as the chief solace of his solitude at Boulogne.

At the end of December Ruskin is writing to his father to thank him for sending flowers and sweets to the Carlyles.

> 'Rosie is better, and if she were not, the flowers would do her no good. And they *do* do good to Mrs. Carlyle. I have such a coaxing letter from Rosie that I might perhaps have come home three days sooner for it, only perhaps Mamma and you might have been more jealous than pleased, and Mrs. La Touche thought me absurd.'

Rose, who was fond of nicknames, had christened her governess 'The Bun,' and called Ruskin 'St. Crumpet.' [1] Mrs. La Touche reports a conversation between herself and her daughter – a dialogue which Ruskin further reports to his father.

Mrs. La T. Rosie, don't you wish St. Crumpet would come home?

Rosie. Yes, indeed I do. How tiresome of him!

Mrs. La T. Do you think he wants us at all?

Rosie. Well, perhaps he does. I think he wants to see *me*, Mamma.

Mrs. La T. And doesn't he want to see me?

Rosie. Well – you know – well – Mamma, I think he likes your letters quite as much as yourself, and you write so very often, and I can't write often, so he must want to see me.

This little dialogue, its reporting to Ruskin by Mrs. La Touche, and his reporting of it to his father, gives an insight into the chain of relationship amongst the four people.

It is easy to imagine that apart from the prestige, it must have been fun to have letters from Ruskin, for he was an admirable letter writer. Even his business letters are often funny. While he was away, for instance, Smith & Elder published a volume of selections.

> 'Don't send the book of extracts to anybody that you can help (writes Ruskin). Above all, don't send it here. It is a form of mince-pie which I have no fancy for. My crest [2] is all very well as long as it means pork, but I don't like being made into sausages.'

Having got home at the New Year, Ruskin only remained for a very short time, and by May he had had enough of

[1] 'St. Crumpet' was often shortened to 'St. C.,' and it is typical of Mrs. La Touche's biographer that she gives the name as 'St. Chrysostom.'

[2] A boar's head.

Denmark Hill, and was off to Italy again. This journey shall serve as a type, for there is an admirable account of it. He took out with him Mr. and Mrs. Burne-Jones – otherwise 'his dear children, Edward and Georgie' – and Georgiana has left her full impressions of the journey.

§ 3

The young Burne-Joneses had had an unfortunate year. Edward and the baby had been ill, Georgiana had been worried; and Ruskin, with characteristic benevolence, carried the painter and his wife off to Italy with him, while the baby was left with its grandmother in Manchester. Burne-Jones was at that time an enthusiastic, fragile young man in the late twenties, and like his friend, William Morris, he had been a lifelong admirer of Ruskin. For a long while before he married, he and Morris had shared a room as study, studio and workshop; and here, whenever a new book by Ruskin came out, Morris would chant the precious words aloud to Burne-Jones as he painted. Burne-Jones's worship of Ruskin seems to have been boundless. On the morning after he and his Georgiana became engaged, for instance, he came round to see his beloved, and, as the most precious things he possessed, laid his Ruskin books at her feet.

> 'After the anxieties and troubles of winter and early spring (writes Georgiana), it was sweet to us to become children again and to rest upon one so much older and stronger than ourselves as Mr. Ruskin. He did everything *en prince*, and he had invited us as his guests for the whole time, but again in his courtesy agreed to ease our mind by promising to accept the studies that Edward should make while in Italy.'

Her journal gives us, then, this journey as a type of all

Ruskin's countless journeys to Switzerland in the transition days between posting and railway.

They crossed from Folkestone, and stayed the night at Boulogne, where they walked on the shore, the tide being far out and only a grey strip of wet sand lying before them.

> 'Here (writes Georgiana) a mood of melancholy came over Mr. Ruskin, and he left us, striding away by himself towards the sea. His solitary figure looked the very emblem of loneliness as he went, and we never forgot it.'

Next day they went on, and stayed for two days in Paris, where 'of course we visited the Louvre.'

> 'Mr. Ruskin dined out on Sunday evening, and on his return he told us where he had been. It was to the house of Adèle, his first love, long since married in France. I think he had met there perhaps a sister of hers, at all events some two or three people who had known him as a boy, and he seemed in a dream of the past, as he threw himself down on a couch and talked to us. "They called me John," he said, and we felt how few people could ever do that, and how sweet it must have been to him. Then he went on to tell us how good a wife Adèle was, and the image of the lady was stamped on the minds of his hearers, as he told them that in her country home she used to amuse her husband, who was a sportsman, by translating *Punch* to him.'

Perhaps some readers may feel that poetic justice had been done to Adèle.

From Paris they went to Dijon, and from there to Basle, where they stood on the balcony of the 'Three Kings' over the rushing river, and had *truite au bleu* for dinner in their private sitting-room. Then they travelled on again to Lucerne, and there they stopped for a few days.

> 'One afternoon we rowed out on the lake, and the two men talked all the time of scientific discoveries about the formation of the earth and the gradual development upon it of animal life – Edward contributing a description, I remember, of an era when huge white cockroaches reigned supreme.'

Thence they went by lake steamer to Flüelen. That evening they sat in a room with an exquisitely clean bare-boarded floor, and Ruskin read Keats to them. The crossing of the St. Gothard pass in carriages was a delightful experience, and Georgiana was thrilled when their road 'cut through the eternal snows.' Then at last they plunged down into Italy.

> 'The beautifully engineered road waved before us. Our leading horse was unfastened and went to the rear, and the other two horses flew along with the carriage. Sometimes the zigzag of the road was so sharp that the horse who followed would look down upon us from the turn above, as if he needed only a sign to jump into our laps.'

Next day, still driving, they passed by Lugano and Como.

> '. . . Past gardens whose roses were bubbling over the tops of their high walls. . . . At last it grew dark, and fireflies came out before we reached Milan. How frightened we were there next morning when the spirit of the mountaineer showed itself in our beloved companion and made him skip about on the steep slopes of the Cathedral roof, until each moment we thought to see him fall into the Piazza below, where the omnibuses crawled no bigger than flies!'

From Milan Ruskin took them to Parma for two days to see the Correggios and hear the opera. Then they went back to Milan, where Ruskin remained, sending the Burne-Joneses on to Verona, Padua, and Venice.

> 'The sense of our friend's great loneliness of spirit came over us again at parting, when he said, without leaving us room to doubt his affection, that he never minded the going away of anyone.'

All through this journey Ruskin, as usual, either wrote or telegraphed to his parents every day.

Ruskin had a woman correspondent, Lady Trevelyan, to whom he often wrote very freely, and while the Burne-Joneses were in Venice she had apparently written to him at Milan to say that he ought to go back to his father. To her Ruskin replies from Milan on July 20, 1862:

> 'I know my father is ill, but I cannot stay at home just now, or should fall indubitably ill myself also, which would make him worse. He has more pleasure if I am able to write him a letter than generally when I am there, for we disagree about all the Universe, and it vexes him, and much more than vexes me. If he loved me less and believed in me more, we should get on; but his whole life is bound up in me, and yet he thinks me a fool – that is to say, he is mightily pleased if I write anything that has big words and no sense in it, and would give half his fortune to make me a Member of Parliament if he thought I would talk, provided only that talk hurt nobody and was all in the papers. This form of affection galls me like hot iron, and I am in a subdued fury whenever I am at home, which dries all the marrow out of every bone in me.'

The situation has perhaps never been more graphically expressed. Of course the description is unfair, but if we condemn Ruskin for it, let us not forget that daily letter or telegram. However, the facing of the situation in his own mind was something. Unfortunately he faced it as a man of forty-three who already felt himself middle-aged. He writes

to Norton of his loneliness at home, and of his longing to break away from it all finally. But he cannot, he says, resolve to give such pain to his parents. But for the La Touches he does not know how it would all have ended. 'A little child put her finger on the helm at the right time.'

But he could not act upon his feelings. He only made little gestures towards independence, little dashes at living in Switzerland, for instance, and vague schemes for London. The company of the Burne-Joneses now recalled the thought of Rossetti, whom he had once loved and who was the leader of the circle in which the Burne-Joneses moved. Ruskin and Rossetti had fallen out. They were two masterful men, both of whom were apt to lead in any company in which they moved. But in spite of estrangements Ruskin always hankered after Rossetti, who seems to have had extraordinary charm. So now, with these half-formed schemes of emancipation, William Rossetti tells us how Ruskin wrote to Dante Gabriel from Milan to ask if he could rent a room in Rossetti's Chelsea house. This was the famous house, full of blue china and ingle-nooks, which was shared between Rossetti, Swinburne, and a menagerie of odd beasts such as wombats. The interesting plan came to nothing. Rossetti could never have stood such companionship.

§ 4

Soon the Burne-Joneses rejoined Ruskin, bringing him back the sketches from Venice which were to repay him for his hospitality. Ruskin had learned to manage sacristans and had put his art at Burne-Jones's disposal.

> 'I am drawing (writes Burne-Jones to a friend) from a fresco that has never been seen since the day it was painted, in jet darkness, in a chapel where candlesticks, paper flowers and wooden dolls abound freely.

> Ruskin, by treacherous smiles, and winning courtesies, and delicate tips, has wheedled the very candlesticks off the altar for my use, and the saint's table, and his everything that was his. As for that same Ruskin (Edward goes on), what a dear he is! Of his sweetness, his talk, his look – how debonair to every one – of the nimbus round his head, and the wings to match, consult some future occasions of talk.'

When the Burne-Joneses went back to England and their baby, Ruskin went to Switzerland. He writes to his father at the end of October:

> 'I have had so good a day to-day that it almost frightens me, lest I should be fey, or lest something should be going to happen. I have been literally in high spirits, the first time this six or seven years. I was walking on the old, old road from Geneva to Chamouni, down the steep hill to the bridge and up again towards Bonneville – Mont Blanc so clear, and all the near mountains so purple and pure, and the sunshine so dazzling and air crystal with slight bracing north wind; and I had found out quantities of things in a heap in Homer and Theognis in the morning, and found more in my head as I walked; and came to old things by the roadside that I had known these twenty years, and it was so like a dream. Then when I came home I had your pleasant letter, and a nice one from Froude, and a nice one from Allen, giving good accounts of college (the Working Men's College), and sat after dinner on my sofa quietly, watching the sunshine fade softly on the mountains . . . and it was so strange to me to feel happy that it frightens me.'

Froude was to publish the new essays in Political Economy that Ruskin was writing. He felt that he was

made of sterner stuff than Thackeray, and professed not to be afraid.

In November Ruskin was back again in London, living with his parents, and giving an address to the Working Men's College. The Burne-Joneses give an account of the visit they paid him at Denmark Hill.

> 'The fact that it was his home gilded it within and without. Otherwise it had no charm, but was a house of the dullest and most commonplace type. A huge cedar in front of it was the only thing that redeemed the approach from bald ugliness.'

A dinner at Denmark Hill followed a week or two later. Georgiana reports it with insight.

> 'The appearance of old Mr. Ruskin was striking. His dignity and simplicity, together with a latent tenderness of manner, made our hearts expand with confidence. He was a fair height and size altogether, neither so tall nor so thin as his son, and a dark plum-coloured evening coat which he wore impressed us by its individuality and as being a link with the past.
>
> 'The little old lady who ruled the house from her low seat by the fireside was less easy to understand. She had had an accident not long before we saw her – a fall, in which what she always called her "limb" was broken – and though it had been properly set it had stiffened in some way, so that she could not walk without help. It was her nature, I suppose, which made her choose for support the back of a chair rather than the arm of either husband or son. . . . She walked from the drawing-room to the dining-room, leaning upon a chair which moved easily on castors as she pushed it before her, and evidently carrying out an established custom,

Edward was repelled by the old lady's sharp decisive manner, and could not like her thoroughly. At dinner, if anything her son said, though not addressed to herself, did not reach her ear, she demanded to have it repeated, and from her end of the table came a clear thread of voice, "John, John Ruskin, what was that you said?" When the sharply questioning sound at last penetrated to him he never failed with the utmost respect to repeat his words for her.'

§ 5

Before he left Mornex Ruskin had written two of the essays for Froude, and his return to Switzerland at Christmas (though sufficiently accounted for perhaps by the atmosphere of home) was probably hastened by the necessity of getting on with this piece of work. Two had already appeared in the *Frazer's Magazine* for September and December, and Ruskin was now engaged on the third. The concentration of language in them was extreme, and Ruskin later thought it affected.

Munera Pulveris is the most sensible, if not the most brilliant, of Ruskin's political writings. With less of naïve charm than *Unto This Last* and without the indignant lightnings of *Fors Clavigera*, *Munera Pulveris* contains a considerable amount of close reasoning and evidences of a more practical line of thought. In it Ruskin urges that merchants are properly only porters who convey goods which are in process of exchange, between the producer and the consumer. They are, or should be, insignificant third parties to the vital transaction. Such being their function, when their activities are stripped and analysed, Ruskin holds that they should be paid by 'mere' wages, and not by 'gain dependent on the state of the market' – commonly called profits.

> 'Such gain . . . is unjust in this most fatal way . . . that it depends, first, on keeping the exchangers ignorant of the exchange value of the articles; and secondly, on taking advantage of the buyer's need and the seller's poverty.'

Had he here included bankers among merchants, as he did later, the argument would have been that of Lenin's *Imperialism* – and an up-to-date attack upon finance, as against industrial, capital.

But unlike Lenin, Ruskin goes on to say that such evils as the exploitation of producer and consumer by the merchant cannot be repressed by law. 'Sin sticks fast between the jointings of buying and selling.' The only hope lies in 'radically purifying the national character.'

If not perhaps very helpful about method, Ruskin continues in *Munera Pulveris* to show himself often very thorough in aim. He attacks the gold standard as a relic of barbarism, discusses (in a paper only included in the Library Edition) a standard based instead on food and fuel, relates how he has tried to see how one could be worked out 'founded on the ultimate standard of a ship's biscuit,' and finally, in a foot-note, comes over to the idea of a managed currency, or, as he characteristically calls it, a standard 'wholly ideal.'

But he is as usual at his best when he attacks.

> 'If our present doctrines of political economy be just, let us trust them to the utmost. Let our future sieges of Sebastopol be done by contract – no capture, no pay – (I admit that things might sometimes go better so); and let us sell the commands of our prospective battles, with our vicarages, to the lowest bidder; so may we, have cheap victories, and divinity. On the other hand, if we have so much suspicion of our science that we dare not trust it on military or spiritual business,

> would it not be but reasonable to try whether some authoritative handling may not prosper in matters utilitarian? If we were to set our governments to do useful things instead of mischievous, possibly even the apparatus itself might in time come to be less costly. The machine, applied to the building of the house, might perhaps pay, when it seems not to pay, applied to pulling it down. If we made in our dockyards ships to carry timber and coals, instead of cannon, and with provision for the brightening of domestic solid culinary fire, instead of for the scattering of liquid hostile fire, it might have some effect on the taxes.'

He goes on to sketch a case for government enterprise.

Amusing as much of it is, the book, as a whole, is not without a taint of the moralizing discursiveness that was to make *Time and Tide* almost unreadable. Ruskin, when he prepared a later edition, said that he thought much of the essay affected. The book, like almost all that he wrote, must in fact be judiciously skipped through. There is too much of Vulcan, Demodocus, Charis, Aglaia, Eleutheria, and the Three Graces. There are too many plays upon words, and we are told too much about the 'deep and intricate significance' of too many passages in Dante or Homer. In Ruskin's own words – there had been too much 'thinking long over particular passages, in many and many a solitary walk towards the mountains of Bonneville or Annecy.'

Such were the papers that appeared in *Frazer's Magazine*. A sense of having done his duty does not seem to have made Ruskin any more cheerful.

In March, 1863, he wrote from his retreat at Mornex to C. E. Norton, in a famous phrase:

> 'The loneliness is very great, and the peace in which I am at present is only as if I had buried myself in a tuft of grass on a battle-field wet with blood – for the cry of

> the earth about me is in my ears continually if I do not lay my head to the very ground.'

And a few months later:

> 'I am still very unwell, and tormented between the longing for rest and lovely life, and the sense of this terrific call of human folly crying for resistance, and of human misery for help, and it seems to me as the voice of a river of blood which could but sweep me down in the midst of its black clots, helpless.'

Munera Pulveris excited almost as much disapproval as had *Unto This Last*. The publishers indignantly intervened, and once more the series was stopped. 'Readers of *Frazer*,' says Ruskin, 'as those of the *Cornhill*, were protected for that time from further disturbance on my part.'

George Allen says that when Ruskin heard the news of this second veto, 'he paced the terrace walk at Mornex for hours, like a caged lion.' In London the heresy hunt was at its height, for *Unto This Last* appeared in book-form just at the time when *Munera Pulveris* was coming out as a serial, and the two were received with equal contempt from the Press.

Ruskin's father was stampeded in the general rush and, though he had approved (at any rate in a modified way) of *Until This Last*, he now wrote begging his son to alter or suppress it and its successor. To this Ruskin writes back sharply:

> 'Read of me what you can enjoy. Put by the rest and leave my reputation in my own hands and God's – in whose management of the matter you and Mamma should trust more happily and peacefully than I can.'

Once more Carlyle backed him up, and took the trouble to write to his father in a parable. 'When Solomon's temple

was building,' wrote Carlyle, 'it was credibly reported that at least 10,000 sparrows sat on the trees round declaring that it was entirely wrong and contrary to received opinion, hopelessly condemned by public men, etc. Nevertheless, it got finished, and the sparrows flew away and began to chirp the same note about something else.' To Ruskin himself Carlyle wrote that he approved the essays in every particular, and found them calm, definite, and clear.

With the loss of his public, Ruskin's inspiration once more seemed to run out, just as it had in the case of *Unto This Last*.

CHAPTER XXII

1863: Aged 44

CRYSTALS AND THE SCHOOL AT WINNINGTON

§ 1

Should he leave England with her problems and her friction altogether, and go and live in Switzerland? Ruskin wandered restlessly about the Alpine valleys collecting data for a geology paper for the Royal Institution, and with this thought turning and churning itself about in his head. He felt that his mouth had been stopped. Nobody wanted his new message. Why should he go on casting his pearls? He was determined not to write any more upon political economy, until his public could bring itself to a better frame of mind; while his promise to Mrs. La Touche bound him not to express his present feeling against religion.

So in May, 1863, he came back to London, and, in a mood that he describes as 'sulky,' lectured upon the stratification of the Alps to a crowded audience. On such a nice safe subject his public were once more all deference, and flocked into the Institution's rooms to hear him.

But Ruskin's interest in geology was quite a genuine one, and his desire to teach ineradicable. He had already, for instance, tried to interest Carlyle in the structure of rocks – a subject of which Carlyle was darkly ignorant and slightly suspicious, as indeed he was of all natural science. Ruskin

always hoped that he might lure his political master out to Switzerland one day and there widen Carlyle's deep trench of knowledge. They had discussed the scheme by letter, and Carlyle writes to Ruskin:

> 'I have a notion to come out actually some day soon; and take a serious Lecture from you on what you really know . . . about the Rocks . . . which have always been venerable and strange to me. Next to nothing of rational could I ever learn of the subject. That of a central fire, and molten sea, on which all mountains, continents, and strata are spread floating like so many hides of leather, knocks in vain for admittance into me these forty years: who of mortals can really believe such a thing!'

However, nothing came of this plan. This was unfortunate, for probably Carlyle's habitual lamentations and real deep sympathy would have done the contradictious and affectionate Ruskin good, if they could have lived and walked in the Alps together for a time.

As it was, Ruskin did not stay long in London. He could not be held by a little applause: he was too unhappy at home, and too restless, to stay long, even though Carlyle and the Burne-Joneses and Rossettis were there, and though as a 'great man' he might still see as much of the best company as he liked, however heretical his views. Matthew Arnold sees him at a dinner party that summer:

> [1] 'On Sunday night I dined with Monckton Milnes, and met all the advanced liberals in religion and politics and a Cingalese in full costume. . . . The philosophers were fearful! G. Lewis, Herbert Spencer, a sort of pseudo-Shelley called Swinburne, and so on. Froude, however, was there, and Browning and Ruskin; the latter and I had some talk, but I should never like him.'

[1] *Matthew Arnold's Letters.*

Ruskin and Matthew Arnold ought in theory to have liked each other. For Ruskin had been buffeted into the position of every unsuccessful reformer – that of an educator of the young. It was a position that Matthew Arnold, with his sensibility, had instinctively adopted, with little more personal buffeting than the French news in the gazettes of 1848.

§ 2

There were three ways in which Ruskin's interest in education had expressed itself. First there had been the Working Men's College, then there was his interest in the young daughters of his various friends (particularly in Rose La Touche). The third way was an extension and generalization of this – his interest in Winnington Hall.

Miss Bell, the head mistress of this new and enterprising girls' school, had taken some of her pupils to hear Ruskin lecture in Manchester. Meeting him after the lecture, she had persuaded him to visit the school. He found it lodged in a charming country house of the style of the brothers Adam. This house was set in a park of fine trees, which sloped to a river. The idea of the school was apparently to make the whole establishment as homelike as possible, and the best cultural influences were sought.

Here – in this nursery for the young females of the governing class – Ruskin was often to take refuge. Here, a little wistfully, he brought his friends – perhaps in order to show them that somewhere on earth there really did exist human nature as he postulated it. Here were gentle, decorative creatures whose only faults were a little idleness, a little impishness – creatures who wanted to learn, who were on the whole both hopeful and tender-hearted. Georgiana Burne-Jones shows him to us at Winnington, as he takes his place occasionally in a quadrille or a country dance.

'He looked very thin, scarcely more than a black line, as he moved about amongst the white girls in his evening dress.'

Two years later he was, between the dialogues of *Ethics of the Dust*, to give an unforgettable picture of himself, sitting by the fireside among the children and young ladies of Miss Bell's establishment.

It is of course easy to criticize these girls' school activities of Ruskin's, especially if we consider them in conjunction with his love for Rose La Touche, for whom he began to care before she was twelve. His taste for the society of very young ladies has been commented on by each of his biographers in turn. Mr. A. C. Benson summed up the accepted attitude in a paragraph of his *Study in Personality*:

> '. . . One cannot have everything in everybody, and it is idle to deny a certain feminine touch in Ruskin's nature . . . instinctive and fostered by seclusion which made him all his life more at ease in the society of women than of men. Perhaps he over-valued sympathy and demonstrative attention and petting and tender ways of life; sometimes the long-haired maidens of Winnington betrayed him into a sort of semi-paternal sentimentality. . . . He was a very unhappy man at that time, conscious of failure and ineffectiveness.

Though part of the attraction may have been, and certainly must have been, of a kind that Ruskin would never have admitted or acknowledged, yet there were reasons which might have made his choice of this sphere of influence a rational, and not an emotional one.

Ruskin, we must remember, when he first went to Winnington, was still bent upon affecting practical economics by arguing with the upper classes. He had influenced their thoughts and conduct extensively in the sphere of taste in landscape and the fine arts; and (not being a Marxian) he

saw no reason why he should not equally affect their political and economic theory and practice.

He had failed in his direct efforts to do this. The articles in *Frazer's* and the *Cornhill* had received no support. What more natural, then, that after such a rebuff he should turn to the teaching of young people whose minds were still open, but whose hands, owing to their position in society, must infallibly soon be on the helm? But the education of the boys of the ruling class in England was set. Their upbringing was a classical formula, which left no chink through which to pour Ruskin's infusion of the arts and natural sciences mixed with subversive doctrine.

But with girls it was different. As long as nobody made love to the daughters of the manor houses and castles of England, and as long as nobody spoiled their complexions, their kind parents did not so very much mind what, if anything, they were taught. Thus to Ruskin, a school where were assembled some fifty children and girls, who would marry the squires, mill-owners, and peers of England, may well have seemed a place of opportunity.

We may be sure that Miss Bell, the head mistress – magnifying her office and proud to be able to serve up so great a man to her pupils – was forward in urging this view. So Ruskin would come up to see Miss Bell and the 'long-haired maidens' every few months, his pockets full of crystals and his head of moral maxims. There he would brood, gazing at the blur of curls and muslin, and looking down into the wide receptive eyes that were turned so respectfully upon him. He would sit with them in the firelight, telling them about the Alps and the Pyramids and the shapes of leaves or of crystals – and about tidiness, and he would bid them think how much they might do in the world if they only chose.

The curious can read it all in *Sesame and Lilies* and *Ethics of the Dust*. Read between the lines, think of Ruskin's delicately guarded body and storm-twisted mind – remember

The Scythian Guest that was, and the 'Visions of hell' that were to come, and there appears something strange and terrible in the stories he would tell them. It is easy to grow half afraid of his valley where the stream ran blood and the rain was tears, and where the thickets with their thorns of diamonds, and roots of gold, entangled and tore the traveller who tried to escape. Mixed up, too, with half-crazy mythologies and allegories, with crystallography and with drawing sprays of oak or hawthorn, Ruskin gave these daughters and future wives of the ruling class, some blunt and shocking truths about the 'Condition of England question.'

He could rouse them to enthusiasm, too: they were waxen and malleable. They could do so much good if they chose – surely they would? Indeed they would! Dear Mr. Ruskin might be quite, quite sure of it! the chorus of clear voices would reply. He would leave Winnington with a sense that he had planted some sort of seed . . . that some day something might come of it. But the crop was mercifully slow to come up. Here, there could be no immediate proof of failure to mock the sower, as in the case of those miserable articles, whose return had been analogous to that given by a punch ball, rather than to that of a crop.

§ 3

To the La Touches he was bound by more consciously personal ties.

It is difficult to form a picture of Rose. She is a bright figure – when she is twelve or so – that much is clear. Then, by the time she is nineteen, though she is as lovely as ever, a shade passes over her, some sort of disappointment, a sense of bewilderment, and perhaps of strain. Sometimes it seems as if it is a kind of spiritual haughtiness, sometimes it seems as if it is despair, that turns her to stone in the end.

But in the early eighteen-sixties, when she is still a child,

she can prattle on paper in a very pretty style. She is away with her parents at Nice, and they have travelled in a carriage, and in a state of unalterable culture, and they have seen everything by the way that they ought to see. She knows to a nicety what one ought to write to Ruskin about:

> 'We liked the picture of Paul Veronese of the children playing with the dog very much. . . . Why does Paul Veronese put his own family in the pictures of sacred subjects, I wonder? I liked the little puppy in the boy's arms, trying to get away – the statues in the Louvre I think most beautiful. Is it wrong, St. Crumpet,[1] to like that noble Venus Victrix as well as Titian? If it is, am I a hardened little sinner? . . . Notre Dame they are spoiling as quick as they can by colouring those grand old pillars with ugly daubs of green and yellow, etc. . . . It's a bore saying all we thought of Paris. I must get on to the mountains, not to say Alps – Don't be *Kingfishery*,[2] dear St. Crumpet; how good it was of you to give yr Turners that you love so much to the Oxford Museum! From Paris we started early on Wednesday morning and travelled all day & all the night in the train – Yes, you would have said "Poor Posie." I *was* bored. But we got over it very well – It was so pleasant to be running after the sun to the south (Don't be Kingfishery) & awaking at about 5 in the morning to see long plains of grey-headed silvery olives and here and there pink perky peach trees dancing among them – And there were groups of dark cool cypress trees pointing upwards, & hills & grey rocks sloping to the sea – the Mediterranean. So we shook off our sleepiness. . . .'

Interspersed like cartilage in a backbone, between all the changes of subject in a very long letter, there are apologies for not having written before, and assurances that they have

[1] Rosie's name for Ruskin. [2] *Kingfishery*. Sitting sulkily on a branch.

all thought about him a great deal. She ends her letter by signing herself 'Ever your Rose,' and saying in a postscript that he cannot write to her at too much length.

> 'Yes, write packets, trunks, and we shall like them so much. Indeed, I couldn't write before. I'll try to write again. You *must* see how we think of you and talk of you.'

She signs the postscript 'Rose Posie.'

To this sort of letter Ruskin would perhaps reply in rhyme: in the letter below, for instance, the parts are reversed, and Ruskin abroad, writes to Rose at home.

> 'Rosie, pet, and Rosie, puss,
> See, the moonlight's on the Reuss:
> O'er the Alps the clouds lie loose,
> Tossed about in silver tangles,
> In and out through all the angles,
> Some obtuse and some acute;
> Lakelet waves, though crisped, are mute,
> Only seen by moving spangles.
> But underneath, the Porter wrangles
> With English wight who German mangles
> And all the bells break out in jangles;
> For here in old Lucerne the times
> Of night and day are taught with chimes
> And moralled in metallic rhymes,
> And divers sorts of tingle-tangles–
> Hark, the watch-tower answers sprightly,
> Saying, if I hear it rightly,
> "Good night, Liffey; bad night, Reuss –
> Good night, Rosie, Posie, Puss." '

He would write to the girls at Winnington, too, sometimes; but the highest style was reserved for Rose.

What was her feeling about those long-haired nymphs?

Was she half jealous to see her private possession, her St. Crumpet, spending himself like that among a whole circle of them, or was she glad, and did she find it a relief? Did he want too much attention, make too many demands, try to screw her up to too constant an admiration of twigs and waves and chalcedony? Or was there a yet more difficult intangible thing about it that made the child uncomfortable? Did her mother seem just a little cross with her, was she made to feel as if she had been naughty if St. Crumpet wrote oftener to her than to Mamma?

§ 4

But even Winnington and Rose could not keep Ruskin in one place for long. By September, 1863, he was back in Switzerland, and the plan for settling there and for building himself a super-chalet was once more uppermost in his thoughts. Burne-Jones would design him a set of hangings with figures from Chaucer, and the girls at Winnington, led by Mrs. Burne-Jones, would work them. There should be stained glass by Rossetti, and his father's best sherry should be lodged in cellars cut from the living rock. But nobody else shared his enthusiasm. Why couldn't he settle in England, and be near them all?

The place that had taken his fancy was on the Brezon above Bonneville. He determined to buy the greater part of the mountain. There was no water. Very well: then he would design an apparatus for collecting snow.

Mrs. Burne-Jones writes in horror to old Mr. Ruskin. Could he not use his influence, if other friends failed? He, after characteristically alluding to her husband as 'Mr. Jones,' appears not to be much perturbed, and ends a long letter with a paragraph of sedate slyness:

'My son has made a short engagement to go to Switzer-

land with the Rev. Osborne Gordon, which I hope he will keep, and I shall endeavour to hope that his Engagements abroad may in future be confined to a Tour with a friend, and that Home Influences may in the end prevail. . . . My Son's fellow Traveller now is the best he could possibly go with. Being rather cynical in his views generally, and not over enthusiastic upon Alps, he is not likely to much approve of the middle heights of the Brezon for a Building Site.'

Time proved old Mr. Ruskin right. Osborne Gordon was as quietly and reasonably caustic as he had hoped. The chalet was never built, partly owing to Osborne Gordon's sniffs, and partly owing to the fact that the citizens of Bonneville had so often seen Ruskin scrambling about the Brezon with a geological hammer in his hand. The Commune had become convinced, from these and other signs, that he had discovered a gold mine, and they therefore proposed him a price suitable to their rational, but erroneous, theory. As for Mornex, and his chalet at the end of all carriage roads, he was out of conceit with this, too, and found that he could no longer endure the 'rabid howlings' on Sunday evenings of the holiday-makers who 'came out from Geneva to get drunk.' So altogether Switzerland was under a temporary eclipse.

In November Ruskin travelled back to England again, but only stayed at Denmark Hill for a few days. They had been enough to generate exasperation, however, and it was with a sense of escape that again he took refuge at Winnington. From here he wrote a letter to his father that shows the state to which he had been reduced, and the cruelty that long subservience had bred in a man whom all his contemporaries unite in calling sweet-natured.

'It is really very hard on you (he writes to his father) that my courses of thought have now led me out of the way of fame – and into that of suffering. . . . One

thing, however, I wish you could put out of your mind – that either Carlyle, Colenso, or Froude, much less any one less than they, have had the smallest share in this change. . . . Men ought to be severely disciplined and exercised in the sternest way in daily life – they should learn to lie on stone beds and eat black soup, but they should never have their hearts broken. . . . The two terrific mistakes which Mamma and you involuntarily fell into, were the exact reverse of this *in both* ways – you fed me effeminately and luxuriously to that extent that I actually now could not travel in rough countries without taking a cook with me! – But you thwarted me in all the earnest fire of passion and life.'

But for all that, Ruskin could not, as we have seen, break his chains. He had written in that strain before. His biographer, Sir E. T. Cook, is of opinion that James Ruskin did not take this letter much to heart: and declares that the indomitable old gentleman considered that his son's 'vexation' was caused by ill health. Certainly the reader will hope that this optimistic opinion was right, for the letter just quoted was almost the last of the daily letters that Ruskin and his father exchanged. The chain had dragged almost to its full length.

§ 5

James Ruskin and his family were spared a long last illness, yet the old merchant was prudent, and moderate to the last, and cannot be said to have died suddenly.

One evening Ruskin, who had been at Denmark Hill for a few weeks, had been dining out. He came home late to find his father sitting up in order to read him two business letters upon which he wanted his son's opinion. The next day James Ruskin became ill, and he was dead in a week.

CHAPTER XXIII

1863–1864: Aged 44–45

JAMES RUSKIN'S DEATH

§ 1

Ruskin was deeply perturbed. Looking back he speaks of 'the lightning that struck his father down in death,' and, though he had had this week of preparation, says that the whole thing was so sudden that, looking back, it is difficult to realize the state of mind in which it left him or his mother.

He goes on to say that his principal feeling was certainly anxiety for her, who had been for so many years in every thought dependent on his father's wishes. She had withdrawn herself from all other social pleasures (Ruskin feels sure) in order to be her husband's companion. He does not know how the world will go on, or how the gap is to be filled; and is amazed at first, to find that she can turn to him, and that he can become another ideal to her. She seems to find new hope and pride in him, even. She is proud to learn that financially her son has been trusted, and that the will is a public declaration of his father's belief in his prudence.

§ 2

So he writes twenty years after. But from the letters that he wrote at the time, we gain a very distinct impression. Six days after his father's death he wrote to Henry Acland,

his Oxford friend, with the same terrible frankness with which he had written a month or two before to his father.

> 'You never have had – nor with all your medical experience have you ever, probably, seen - the loss of a father who would have sacrificed his life for his son, and yet forced his son to sacrifice his life to him, and sacrifice it in vain. It is an exquisite piece of tragedy altogether – very much like Lear, in a ludicrous commercial way – Cordelia remaining unchanged and her friends writing to her afterwards – wasn't she sorry for the pain she had given her father by not speaking when she should?'

'Not speaking when she should?' What does he mean? Perhaps not acting when he should. For he had spoken as we have seen – truth so unpalatable as to be (Cook thinks) inaudible and invisible – a truth upon which he never had the strength or the callousness to act.

The shock of his father's death intensified his feelings on the religious side also, and he looked out, at the Christians about him, as well as in, at his own heart. He had written to a certain Mr. Woodd to tell him when the funeral was to be; nor had he been surprised, he writes, to get Woodd's letter saying that he wanted to come to it.

> 'People think it respectful to see their friends buried. To me, it is, as it always has been of late years, one universal puzzle. To see you Christians as gay as larks while nothing touches you in your own affairs or friends – watching thousands of people massacred and tortured – helping to do it – selling them guns to shoot each other with, and talking civilities and protocols to men who are walking up to their loins in human blood. Presently God knocks you on the head with a coffin's end, and you suddenly perceive that something has

gone wrong – scratch your heads – say – "Dear me – here's one of *my* friends dead – really the world is a very sad world. How very extraordinary! let me improve the occasion!" You are funny people – *vous autres*. I wish you were not coming or would not come to-morrow, for you are real friends.'

However, the last rites ground themselves out for poor Ruskin, as they do for us all. A fall of late snow muffled the sound of the wheels to Margaret, sitting upright and stern in the drawing-room.

Ruskin himself composed his father's epitaph:

'Here rests from day's well-sustained burden,
JOHN JAMES RUSKIN,
born in Edinburgh, May 18th, 1785.
He died in his home in London, March 3rd, 1864.
He was an entirely honest merchant,
and his memory is, to all who keep it, dear and helpful.
His son, whom he loved to the uttermost
and taught to speak truth, says this of him.'

The epitaph is a study in omissions.

§ 3

When the will was opened, it was found that Mrs. Ruskin had been left the house at Denmark Hill for life and £37,000, while to Ruskin had been left £120,000, besides several leasehold and freehold properties. Some of the business which Ruskin found himself called upon to transact was rather complicated, and he lost £20,000 in the course of transferring £50,000 worth of stock into 'entirely safe mortgages.' Besides this, he distributed £17,000 among those of his father's relations whom he liked best, and who should, he thought, have benefited under the will.

It was probably not till a year or two later that he sold the wine business, getting, according at least to current gossip recorded by William Rossetti, the equivalent of £200,000 for it, or rather an annuity which would have cost him that amount. This transaction appears, however, only to rest on William Rossetti's evidence, and does not appear in Ruskin's own statement of account.

At this time his books were not (as they did later) bringing him in an income. His publishing arrangements had been then, as they were always to be, extremely peculiar, and his books, with their elaborate plates, had been most expensive to produce. So though about £25,000 had been made in sales, the net profit up to that time to Ruskin of all his books was calculated to be about £40.

We shall see later that this position was to improve when one way and another he got through his father's fortune. (It is perhaps interesting to remark here in parenthesis that William Rossetti, a fairly good witness, declared that one of Ruskin's expenses was the maintenance of the parents of his late wife – Mr. and Mrs. Gray of Perth!)

§ 4

After the business of the will was settled, there remained the personal problem of his mother. She was now eighty-three, and it was clear that she could not live alone. Fortunately, just at this time there was in London, staying with a Mrs. Agnew, a member of Ruskin's grandmother's family, a very far-away young cousin of about 17, named Miss Joan Agnew. It was arranged that this girl should come and stay at Denmark Hill for a short time while Ruskin had to be away. She knew all the Perth relations: she would be able to talk of the past, to which Mrs. Ruskin's thoughts so often went back now. She turned out to be a serious, rather pretty girl – markedly Scottish. Ruskin went to fetch her at her

uncle's house, and brought her in the carriage to Denmark Hill, on April 19, 1864.

He watched the encounter with his mother. How would it go? It seemed as if this Joan was not going to be frightened of her, as so many people were. Undoubtedly his mother was pleased. The girl, too, who had heard formidable reports of her hostess, was gratified to find she had made a good impression. The tradition of these first days has been handed down in Joan Agnew's words.

> [1] 'Next morning, she said, "Now tell me frankly, child, what you like best to eat, and you shall have it. Don't hesitate; say what you'd really like – for luncheon to-day, for instance." I said, truthfully, "Cold mutton, and oysters"; and this became a sort of standing order (in months with the letter r) – greatly to the cook's amusement.'

It was arranged that Joanie was to stay for the week of Ruskin's absence, going home when Ruskin came back again.

> [2] 'When the last evening came, of my week, I said . . . "Auntie, I had better go back to my uncle's to-morrow!"
> 'She flung down her netting, and turned sharply round, saying, "Are you unhappy, child?" "Oh, no!" said I, "only my week is up, and I thought it was time – "
> 'I was not allowed to finish my sentence. She said, "Never let me hear you say anything again about going; as long as you are happy here, stay, and we'll send for your clothes, and make arrangements about lessons, and everything else here." '

In the end Joanie stayed for seven years, in fact till her marriage with Mr. Arthur Severn, only now and then going

[1] *Præterita.* [2] *Ibid.*

home to her mother in Scotland, on which occasions she would get little notes from Mrs. Ruskin saying how much she was missed. But even when old Mrs. Ruskin was dead, and Joanie married, the tie was not broken, for it was she and her husband, Mr. Arthur Severn, who were to look after Ruskin in the long years of his feebleness and old age at Brantwood.

Joan seems to have been a general favourite, for half an hour after her arrival Carlyle rode up the front garden at Denmark Hill and stayed for the afternoon. It turned out that Carlyle at Wigtown had known some of Joanie's relations; and after he was gone Joan was able to tell a story against him, which she had heard from an old cousin, a story which increased her prestige with the Ruskins.

At little Cummertrees Church there was a minister who used to be called Daft Davie Gillespie. While this minister was preaching a sermon on 'Youth and Beauty being laid in the grave,' something amused Carlyle, and he was seen to smile; at that the minister stopped suddenly and leant over the pulpit, saying to him threateningly, 'Mistake me not, young man, it is *youth alone* that *you* possess.'

But though this new Joan was a great ally, Ruskin felt he must still be a great deal with his mother. Carlyle did his best to see that there was no unloosing of the knot.

> [1] 'He used all his influence with me, to make me contented in my duty to my mother, which he, as with even greater insistence Turner, always told me was my first.'

And so in the evening Ruskin would read aloud to his mother – not Evangelical theology, as at the time when she broke her leg, but such gentle tales as *Cranford*. Characteristically, Ruskin wrote to Mrs. Gaskell to tell her of his mother's liking for it.

[1] *Præterita*.

'She has read it about five times, but the first time I tried, I flew into a passion at Captain Brown's being killed and wouldn't go any farther – but this time my mother coaxed me past it, and then I enjoyed it mightily. I do not know when I have read a more finished little piece of study of human nature.'

§ 5

The exchange of Evangelical theology for *Cranford* typifies a change in the life at Denmark Hill. Did things change because Joan had come? Or was it because James Ruskin was dead and any change from the primitive, intolerable triangle was a relief? Or did things seem less gloomy because love for Rose La Touche was beginning to light Ruskin's heart?

It is difficult to decide the cause of the improvement in the atmosphere, though to do so with certainty would probably be to solve the central problem of Ruskin's emotional history.

At all events, the fact remains that for a year or two after that spring of 1863 Ruskin was happier than he had been since Effie left him, and the atmosphere about him clearer. He shows us a family scene which is moving in its revelation of small pleasures. Joanie was often driven down from Denmark Hill on afternoon visits to her friends in London.

'I used (Ruskin writes) to leave my study whenever Joanie came back from these expeditions, to watch my mother's face in its glittering sympathy. I think I have said of her before, that although not witty herself, her strong sense gave her the keenest enjoyment of kindly humour, whether in saying or incident; and I have seen her laughing, partly *at* Joanie and partly *with* her, till the tears ran down her still brightly flushing cheeks.'

§ 6

It is agreeable to see Ruskin beginning to take pleasure in society again. He even makes new friends instead of merely collecting disciples. The reader will remember Matthew Arnold's disparaging remark about the 'little pseudo-Shelley' whom he met at Monckton Milnes's. Swinburne was one of these new friends, an equal, and regarded as such by Ruskin – a fact which he made clear to the interfering. He was not shocked by *Poems and Ballads*, or if he were he was not going to lecture Swinburne about it. To a correspondent who wanted him to remonstrate he writes:

> 'He is infinitely above me in all knowledge and power, and I should no more think of advising or criticizing him than of venturing to do it to Turner if he were alive again.'

To Norton, Ruskin wrote of 'Atalanta in Calydon' as the grandest thing ever done by a youth. Swinburne is 'a splendid scholar, with an imagination like a torrent.' 'I'm righter than he is, so are lambs and swallows, but they're not his match.'

Ruskin particularly admired some verses that Swinburne wrote about a picture of Whistler's. Swinburne and Ruskin have been dining together, and next day Swinburne transcribes the song from memory and sends it him. He has been told more than once, he writes, especially by D. G. Rossetti, that the verses were better than the picture, but after looking at the picture carefully again, he is sure that 'in beauty, in tenderness and significance, in exquisite execution and delicate strength,' the verses are not so complete as is Whistler's picture.

> 'I am going [Swinburne goes on] to take Jones (unless I hear from Whistler to the contrary) on Sunday next

in the afternoon to W.'s studio. I wish you could accompany us. Whistler (as any artist worthy of his rank must be) is of course desirous to meet you, and to let you see his immediate work. . . . If I could get Whistler, Jones, and Howell to meet you, I think we might so far cozen the Supreme Powers, as for once to realize a few not unpleasant hours.'

But the Supreme Powers were not cozened. Had Ruskin and Whistler met as proposed, the absurd abuse and lawsuits of twelve years later would probably have been avoided.

Ruskin was full of charities, as usual, and began to use the Howell, above alluded to, as his almoner. Howell appeared to be a marvellous person. He was half Portuguese and had, he said, supported his mother and sisters by diving for the treasure in a sunken galleon. The whole Pre-Raphaelite circle listened wide-eyed to his stories, and Ruskin and Rossetti both often employed him upon secretarial work. He began frequently to come to Denmark Hill, that summer, where Ruskin saw a good deal of company in a quiet way.

The garden was charming that year, and the weather warm and delightful. Ruskin's London friends came up gladly to such a garden, and Ruskin used to take 'Elysian walks with Joanie, and Paradisiacal walks with Rosie.' They used to pace about under the peach-blossom branches by a little glittering stream which Ruskin had paved with crystals for them. He had built, behind the highest cluster of laurels, a small reservoir of water, and from this, on sunny afternoons, he would let a 'rippling film' of water run for a couple of hours down behind the hayfield, where the grass in spring grew fresh and deep. There used to be 'always a corncrake or two' in the meadow, of which Ruskin could never get a glimpse, though he often tried to stalk them. As for the little stream, it had 'its falls, and pools, and imaginary lakes.' Here and there it laid for itself lines of graceful sand. 'It

wasn't the Liffey, nor the Nith, nor the Wandle,' Ruskin writes, 'but the two girls were surely a little cruel to call it "The Gutter"!'

Rosie began to be more and more in Ruskin's thoughts. He writes to Burne-Jones in 1866:

> 'Did you see the gleam of sunshine yesterday afternoon? If you had only seen *her* in it, bareheaded, between *my* laurels and *my* primrose bank!'

Ruskin began to guess, to hope: the child was surely a girl, the girl was surely near enough to being a woman? If he was forty-five or so, was that such an impossible age? He had missed so much, been so unhappy – couldn't this lovely fresh creature make up for it all to him? She talks about heaven to him, but he knows what he wants, he wants her – here on earth, with her red cheeks, pale gold hair and white neck, and the reassurance of her youth.

One present and visible obstacle to their becoming lovers and marrying was that Rosie was so extremely religious. Her mother was a staunch member of the Church of England. Her father had been one, but suddenly, in middle life, and in the midst of Catholic Ireland, he had become a Baptist. Rose would write long letters to Ruskin about religion, and would copy out texts and try to win him back with allegories out of *The Pilgrim's Progress* or *The Faerie Queen*.

> 'Little Rosie (Ruskin had written a year or two before to Professor Norton) is terribly frightened about me, and writes letters to get me to come out of Bypath Meadow – and I won't; she can't write any more just now, for she's given herself rheumatism in her fingers by dabbling all day in her hill river catching crayfish.'

It was a pity for Ruskin that the crayfish stage was ever passed.

CHAPTER XXIV

1864–1867: Aged 45–48

'THE CROWN OF WILD OLIVE' AND GOVERNOR EYRE

'They were not the refuge of a civilization, but the barracks of an industry. The mediæval town had reflected the minds of centuries and the subtle associations of a living society; these towns reflected the violent enterprise of an hour, the single passion that had thrown street on street in a frantic monotony of disorder. These shapeless improvisations represented nothing but the avarice of the jerry-builder catering for the avarice of the capitalist.'

Hammond: The Town Labourer

§ 1

It was in 1864, a year after his father's death, that Ruskin helped to initiate the only successful practical piece of work with which he was ever concerned. Some of the estate left to Ruskin by his father consisted of slum property, and Ruskin now turned over half a dozen houses in Marylebone, and three more in Paradise Place, to a drawing pupil of his, Miss Octavia Hill.

Here she initiated a system of benevolent rent-collecting which afterwards became famous. The houses were kept in proper repair, the rent was moderate, recreation grounds were provided, and above all, the tenants had some fixity of tenure. The financial result of all this, was that Ruskin got 5 per cent. for his capital instead of the 12 or more which slum property at that time usually returned.

Later, when in *Fors Clavigera* Ruskin attacked rent, interest, and profit, even more specifically and strongly than in *Munera Pulveris*, he was criticized for holding this invest-

ment, and in the end he sold the holding to Miss Octavia Hill.

Mr. Collingwood says that he would not spend the £3,500 he got for it:

'It went right and left in gifts: till one day he cheerfully remarked:

"It's a' gane awa'
Like snaw aff a wa'."

"Is there really nothing to show for it?" he was asked. "Nothing," he said, "except this new silk umbrella." '

This anecdote is apparently typical of Ruskin. William Rossetti tells how a couple of years later Ruskin gave £7,000 to a clergyman who was hard up, and how to a Greek woman who applied to him for £10 he sent £100.

§ 2

The giving of lectures and the writing of newspaper articles were two of Ruskin's principal activities in the years immediately following his father's death.

The proclivity had been dammed up. Old James Ruskin, the reader may remember, had opposed his son's appearances on the lecture platform, and now there was nobody to be hurt by it. Ruskin liked lecturing. Besides at this time the shorter, less sustained forms of expression suited him. His public were out of conceit with his politics, and he was out of conceit with his art criticism, and could not have settled to anything. The two interests jostled in his mind at this time, for he found it hard to convey his own sense of their relevance.

He tells an audience of architects in 1865 that he is weary of writing and speaking about art. Having made this declaration, he goes to Abbeville to analyse and draw the flamboyant architecture of the valley of the Somme. Then in

1867 he ends his *Time and Tide* correspondence with the announcement that he has closed his political work for many a day, only to throw himself into it with renewed energy in 1868.

In some of the educational work that he did with Rosie or the girls at Winnington, he reconciled the two interests pretty well. He always, as has been said, had a strong sense of their relevance and often comes back to the point of view that he had originally advanced in *Stones of Venice* – namely, that good art, is founded on honest living. Presumably the horrid spectre of the Swiss, that had once haunted him, had fled. It had been the spectre of a people who never produced any art at all, and yet lived far more virtuously than any of their art-producing neighbours. At any rate, he had somehow got round or over the Swiss, and was back at his original opinion.

His gibes at snobbery and greed began to go off again with their usual gusto. In *King's Treasuries*, a lecture that he gave in Manchester, he remarks that the modern Mamma prays on bended knees 'for an education which shall enable her son . . . to ring with confidence, the visitor's bell at double-belled doors.'

Religion, and particularly revivalism, come into the same lecture. He has no patience with the 'converted dunces' who, having 'lived in cretinous stupefaction half their lives, and suddenly awakening to the fact of there being a God, fancy themselves therefore his peculiar people and messengers.'

But perhaps his best diatribe is against vulgarity: he sums it up in a passage whose last phrase anticipates the terrible note which he was so often to strike in *Fors*.

> 'Simple, innocent vulgarity is merely an untrained, undeveloped bluntness of body and mind. But in true, inbred vulgarity there is a dreadful callousness, which

in extremity becomes capable of every sort of bestial habit and crime – without fear, without pleasure, without horror, and without pity.'

It is difficult for us to recapture the spirit of the last thirty-five years of the nineteenth century. When we see Ruskin or Matthew Arnold, Morris, or Carlyle angry and perturbed in their war with 'Philistinism,' we may perhaps smile, and forget how triumphant that vulgarity was. An age of extraordinary prosperity had set in for the upper and middle classes in England. By 1864 the 'hungry 'forties' were forgotten. It was an age in England that has been compared to the present epoch in America, and its critics have been contrasted with such 'De-bunkers' in America as Sinclair Lewis, Don Marquis, and Mencken. But the 'De-bunkers' to-day are not desperate as the anti-Philistines were desperate: they have seen such an age go and come. The 'De-bunkers' know that these things do not last for ever: besides, a fresher air blows over America to-day than blew in England in the 'sixties and 'seventies. There is no such stodgy, stagnant class among the 'men who knew Coolidge' as was to be found – new and portentous – in the England of 1864.

It was the callousness, and juggernaut quality of the age, which made Ruskin most fear for the future, and for the possibility of establishing anything like a good life in England. It was against mechanical and crudely unscientific materialism that he chiefly hurled his bolts.

He constantly reiterates his creed of vitalism. 'The wealth of a country is in its good men and women, and in nothing else.'

The lectures which he gave between 1864 and 1867 were most of them afterwards twisted up into the two books by which he is most widely known. *Sesame and Lilies*, which was first published in the summer of 1865, soon became his

most popular book. It owes its wide reputation partly to the fact that it was the first of his books which was published cheaply: *Sesame and Lilies* being issued at 3*s.* 6*d.*, while its companion, *The Crown of Wild Olive*, was published at 5*s.* Both books, though they contained a great deal of the excellent hard-hitting of the two phrases just quoted, seem to the present biographer almost unreadable in their entirety. The sense is often excellent, and the magic of some passages is superb. But there is an atmosphere of preaching in them. We are not making discoveries with the author. We are not even being denounced or persuaded for the most part: we are being 'spoken to' in the most odious sense of that idiom.

Contemporary opinion differed. Anthony Trollope found the books 'hardly to be borne.' Leslie Stephen considers Ruskin's style to be at its best in *Sesame and Lilies*; while the *Saturday Review* critic begged Ruskin to change the title to *Thistles and Dead-Sea-Apples*.

Perhaps a chief source of irritation lies in the mingling of the intentional and graceful *naïveté* of *Unto This Last* and *Munera Pulveris*, with occasional pomposity of style, and apparent triviality of purpose. It is (or may be) very nice to see young ladies neatly and suitably dressed, and to see libraries well arranged and purged of many impertinent books, but we cannot, and will not, be 'spoken to' if we have neglected these aids to the good life. In the two books on economics, slight and imperfect as is the treatment, the theme is a great one, and we get no sense of triviality.

Perhaps the value of the two pairs of little books can be best judged by their treatment at the hands of a society which deeply disapproved of Ruskin's beliefs about its proper organization. *Unto This Last* and *Munera Pulveris* were howled down, and *Sesame and Lilies* and *The Crown of Wild Olive* became immensely popular.

However, Manchester and Bradford were not unduly moved. Ruskin writes to Lady Trevelyan:

> 'I got on very well last night, speaking with good loud voice for an hour and a quarter, or a little more – reading, I should say, for I can't speak but when I am excited. I gave them one extempore bit about Circassian Exodus, which seemed to hit them a little, as far as Manchester people can be hit.'

The reader shall not be teased with the various theories as to what Ruskin meant by the title *Sesame and Lilies*, but shall only be reminded that 'Sesame' is not only a useful grain, but also, notoriously, a charm in a well-known fairy-tale.

Ruskin also carried on his political work in letters to the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1864. The letters do not show any new aspects of his thought, but go to prove that he could keep his temper pretty well in a controversy, and was a fair, but not brilliant, debater.

§ 3

In 1865 he, for once, did not go abroad, but was fairly steadily in London. This led to his interesting himself in the Working Men's College again. This time he appeared as a lecturer and not as a drawing master, and he was inclined to talk to them on such subjects as 'Work and Wages,' rather than on perspective or mouldings. One rather regrettable event in an otherwise prosperous time in London was his final breaking off of relations with Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Ruskin did not like the way Rossetti was painting now, and, as his first patron, did not scruple to tell him so. There are particularly some flowers used as the foreground of a picture which seem to Ruskin coarsely painted. They are powerful, certainly, but seem to him to show a 'non-sentiment,' which is very distasteful. He is very positive about them, and very sure that the painter was

wrong. Dante Gabriel Rossetti was not by any means the man to stand this sort of dictatorial fault-finding, and, after this year, the two men never saw each other again.

§ 4

It was 1865, when Rose was between seventeen and eighteen, that her elder sister Emily married, and in the February of the next year Ruskin, who was forty-seven proposed to Rose, at the same time asking her parents formally for her hand.

From what can be gathered of the story Mr. and Mrs. La Touche seem to have played either a foolish or a cruel part. For at this juncture they stepped in, and, with the girl irresolute, tipped the scale against Ruskin – a man whom a hint could have discouraged a year or two earlier.

Was Mrs. La Touche really aimlessly blind and cruel, or had there been for years a private and intimate emotion behind her previous encouragement of Ruskin? And was there now, equally, a private sentiment of surprise and anger at his definite and formal declaration of his love for her daughter? After all, Mrs. La Touche was a beautiful and spirited woman, married to a man who seems to have had a touch of religious melancholy. She was herself five or six years younger than Ruskin, and openly revered and esteemed him. Who knows what unacknowledged dreams and fancies were spoiled when Mrs. La Touche found herself to be without equivocation the mother of the woman whom Ruskin loved?

An alternative explanation of the sudden change of the La Touches' attitude would be that they began to make inquiries as soon as Ruskin talked of marriage, and that in answer to these inquiries they were told of physical infirmities which made it impossible for them to consent to

his marrying Rose. But there is evidence [1] to the effect that it was jealousy that made Mrs. La Touche suddenly hostile, and that the weapon the parents used against Ruskin with Rose, was the accusation of his being an immoral character.

Be the motives and explanations what they may, however, the facts seem clear enough. On February 2, 1866, Ruskin asked Rose La Touche to marry him, and at the same time formally approached her parents. They, having encouraged him for years in every possible way, professed themselves surprised and reluctant, while Rose herself was irresolute. The practical upshot of his declaration was that her parents decreed that they were not to meet or correspond for some time. But if Ruskin would wait, Rose promised that she would give him her answer in three years – in fact as soon as she was twenty-one.

Poor Ruskin could do nothing but bow to this decision, and immediately began to number off the time on his diary. Thus for three years he lived in the hope of marrying his Rose and of beginning his life again.

§ 5

Soon after suffering the mixed pain and hope of Rose's decision, Ruskin arranged to go abroad again. His old friend Lady Trevelyan had to leave England for her health, and Ruskin decided to join her and her husband and to take with him Joan Agnew. Another girl, Miss Constance Hilliard, Lady Trevelyan's niece, was also of the party. Joan had never been abroad, and no doubt it was impossible for her to live much longer as a member of the Ruskin household, without having seen and admired the scenery of which they were for ever talking.

So once more the familiar road was to be taken, and Ruskin was to set himself on the mental tram-line laid by the habits

[1] Conversation with Dr. Greville Macdonald.

of years through Normandy and the Jura, with Venice for its terminus.

How well Ruskin's French admirer, Marcel Proust, understood that gouging out of grooves to which some natures take. There was for Ruskin 'Du Côté de Chez Guermantes,' and there was 'Du Côté de Chez Swann'; there was, in short, a choice between Switzerland and Italy. On the way there were certain inns and roads and views, there were certain turns in the road where you left the carriage and walked. There was Paris with its Louvre, and sometimes with its Adèle-Clotilde. Other stations and halts were Chamounix, Milan, and Verona. But as for Spain, the Balkans, Russia, America, North Africa, or the tropics, they might just as well never have been created.

§ 6

So on April 23, 1866, Ruskin, Sir Walter Trevelyan, his wife and the two girls, were to set out, and on April 22 Ruskin went to Cheyne Walk to take his leave of Mrs. Carlyle and to bring her a few flowers. Here he was met at the door by a maid whose weeping face warned him of what he must hear. She told him that Mrs. Carlyle had, only an hour or two before, died of heart failure in her brougham in the Park.

It must have seemed impossible to those who knew her, that Jane Carlyle could be dead, and that she had gone like a puff of smoke. She was a bright imperfect creature of the earth. Her joys and sorrows had all been raised beyond the general standard like the mountains on a contour map. Her days had been vivid and her thoughts had been of here and now, while her movements had been as bright and intense as those of a mouse. It seemed impossible that she should be gone so suddenly and so senselessly. There seemed nothing but the maid's face of sorrow to make her words

credible. Carlyle was in Scotland, and even he knew nothing about it as yet: they had telegraphed, but it was doubtful if he would get the news that night, and quite certain that it must be a day or two before he could get back to London to this strange, impossible disappearance.

Why did Ruskin not stay behind to comfort him? He did not, and there seems a blank, and a hardness here. Perhaps it was because Lady Trevelyan was ill and the journey was for her. Perhaps it was because even friendship was dimmed by the hypnotism of those tram-lines. At any rate, Ruskin and the whole party set out the next day in spite of what had befallen their circle.

But it was an ill-fated journey: Lady Trevelyan got worse, and at Neuchâtel she died. The weather, but for a biting wind, was mockingly exquisite, and the day before her death Ruskin describes how he and the girls had picnicked in a sheltered place, among lilies of the valley and apple-blossom on which the sun shone warm, and with the great panorama of the Jungfrau, Eiger and Blumlisalp rising before them.

Ruskin seems to have behaved extremely well. He determined that the two girls – the 'children,' as he called them – should have their holiday as little spoilt as possible; and he got Sir Walter, Lady Trevelyan's husband, to go on to Thun and Interlaken. He writes with a queer tranquillity less than a week after his friend's death:

> 'I have had a rather bad time of it at Neuchatel, what with Death and the North Wind, both devil's inventions, as far as I can make out.'

Then he goes on to describe a walk by the lake-shore in cloudless calm, at five o'clock in the morning.

While he was at Lucerne with this party, some of his friends, among them Acland, made an odd but definite effort to get him back to the arts, by asking him to allow his name to be brought forward for the Professorship of

Poetry at Oxford, which Matthew Arnold had just vacated. Probably Ruskin knew less about literature than about any of the other arts.[1] At any rate he refused.

§ 7

This tour was a long one, and when he came back from it Ruskin found himself involved in one of the least appropriate episodes of his life.

Carlyle had taken up a cause, and half Ruskin's acquaintance had ranged themselves on one side or the other. The British Governor of Jamaica, Mr. John Edward Eyre, had suppressed a rebellion in the island which he ruled, and in the course of his military and judicial operations, had burnt a thousand native houses, sanctioned a number of executions, and above all, hanged one George William Gordon, the chief advocate of the rights of the negroes. It was a fantastic fate which chose to concern John Ruskin in such a tale. The story seems to have run as follows:

John Edward Eyre, a typical mid-Victorian Empire-builder – brave, realistic and uncritical – was, as we have said, Governor of Jamaica. Here, in 1865, in an island inhabited by 13,000 white people and 450,000 negroes (who had been recently emancipated from slavery) there happened to exist all the ingredients for a revolution. There was, for example, a great deal of poverty in the island, which some respectable observers attributed to such causes as heavy taxation, the division of the best of the cultivable country among the large sugar estates, and the competition on the world market with other sugar-producing islands where the estates were still cultivated by slaves working eighteen to twenty hours a day. Other observers, though agreeing about the bad state of the island, were sure that the poverty of Jamaica was solely due to the laziness, dishonesty and

[1] See his letter to Knight, Appendix C.

lewdness of the blacks who inhabited it. A handsome mulatto, named George William Gordon, became the Danton of the rebellion.[1]

One day (the 11th of October), after the distribution of much extremely well-composed incendiary literature, the negroes rose, but not, as had been planned, all over the island at once. The blacks of Stony Gut stormed the court-house at Morant Bay, set it on fire, and went on to burn, mutilate, beat to death, or chop to pieces, a dozen of the leading white colonists. The situation was full of danger for the rest of the whites.

Jamaica is an island with four or five hundred miles of woody and mountainous country, the whites were scattered about in little groups on their estates: there were very few troops. Governor Eyre at once proclaimed martial law. In about a week Gordon was captured, and tried by court-martial. Gordon was certainly a Baptist revivalist, and had further the reputation of being a demi-god, an Obea Man, a wizard immune to bullets, invincible, and beyond human laws. Therefore his execution, which took place a few hours after the court-martial, had a great effect on the revolutionaries.

The other districts did not follow the example of Stony Gut, but merely indulged in a little sniping and arson. It was not more than three, or at most four, weeks after the affair at Morant Bay, before the situation was more or less in hand, and the whites no longer went in fear of a general massacre. Eighty or ninety natives were indicted for high treason, troops penetrated all over the island, while a wild mountain tribe were employed in putting down the rebels of the plains. Eyre himself admitted that he did not know quite what had gone on in the mountain and forest fighting, but agreed that a thousand native huts had been burnt. As far as Jamaica was concerned, the incident was at an end. It was resumed in England.

[1] *A Life of Governor Eyre*, by Hamilton Hume.

Governor Eyre was first praised for his energetic conduct, and then recalled in disgrace. The Society for the Abolition of Slavery seems to have taken up the case against him with singular intemperance of language. They apparently wanted him 'caged with the wild beasts at the Zoo,' and suggested that when this was done the passers-by should spit upon him.[1] He had already been recalled and had lost his post when this suggestion was made by the humanitarians, and now a committee was formed for bringing him to justice on a charge of murder. At the head of this committee was John Stuart Mill, while other members were Herbert Spencer, Huxley, and Goldwin Smith. Upon this an Eyre defence committee was at once formed – chiefly by Carlyle's exertions – and Tennyson, Kingsley, Ruskin and Dickens were among the prominent men whom Eyre found ranked behind him.

It seems as if the rights of the case, on which opinion was so much divided, are summed up by implication in a paragraph in Hamilton Hume's vindication – a work which he entitles *A Life of Governor Eyre*. His vindicator is commenting on Eyre's conduct during the rebellion.

> 'Throughout that terrible period he remained cool and collected. . . . One single false step, one moment's hesitation, and Jamaica would have been taken from our grasp, to be reconquered only with a still more terrible loss of life, and at a price fearful to contemplate.'

Granted, as no doubt Eyre – and every one he had ever seen – did grant, that Jamaica must at all costs belong to the British, it must probably be granted that he acted properly and promptly. It was in fact almost certainly hypocritical to indict Governor Eyre's severities, without questioning our general colonial policy. He was a good, undiscriminating servant, and carried out British policy with firmness but without ferocity. It remained possible to indict our colonial

[1] Hamilton Hume's *Life*.

system, but it may be doubted if many among his attackers had that in mind. Ruskin and Carlyle, therefore, can probably be regarded as defending an honest man. But some at least of the opposed committee can also be applauded as attacking a questionable policy.

Whatever the rights of the case, when Ruskin came back from abroad, it was to find Carlyle (whom he had not seen since his wife's death) deep in plans for the defence of Eyre.

Carlyle at once asked Ruskin to help him. It was not the sort of business that Ruskin knew much about, but Carlyle persuaded him that it was clear where justice lay, and where oppression. Poor Eyre had a large family, and nothing to live on. He had no private fortune, he had been recalled, and had been formally refused any further employment. The Anti-Slavery Society, which success was threatening to destroy, had on the other hand plenty of money and still possessed a formidable organization. Ruskin at once subscribed £100 to the Defence Fund, and, what cost him far more, attended the meetings of the committee and acted as a sort of vice-chairman for Carlyle.

Carlyle in his letters praised the speeches he made there. 'While all the world stands tremulous, shilly-shallying from the gutter, impetuous Ruskin plunges his rapier up to the very hilt in the belly of the monster.' However, in the end Carlyle, after stirring up the dust, came to the conclusion that Eyre was in no immediate danger from the prosecution, and presently claimed the privilege of a bereaved and very sick man. At the end of December, his friend Lady Ashburton carried him off to Mentone.

Howell afterwards let it be understood that Ruskin felt, if not aggrieved at this, at least extremely reluctant to act as deputy. However, there seemed no honourable way out, so he bore it. Probably he rather liked Eyre personally, for according to Carlyle, the Empire-builder had decidedly a touch of Sir Charles Grandison about him.

CHAPTER XXV

1867–1869: Aged 48–50

'TIME AND TIDE'

§ 1

Ruskin himself, when he came to look back over his life, notes 1867 as the date when he became aware of 'the first warning mischief to my health.' But like most of Ruskin's dates, this definite placing of his first trouble must be accepted with caution. Frederic Harrison, his friend and the writer of his life in the *English Men of Letters* series, is, for instance, inclined to see a beginning of brain trouble in the moods and indecisions of a time at least two years earlier. Or if we take Ruskin's own contemporary evidence, we shall find him as early as 1863 (when he was 44) writing of himself with his usual touch of exaggeration as 'tottery in mind.' But such things are only matters of degree, and one thing is clear, that by 1867 Ruskin was suffering from physical as well as mental manifestations of a trouble which appears to have had a psychical rather than a physical origin. He suffered particularly from giddiness and from mistiness in his eyes. Sometimes this year, a week or two would pass in which his state of mind seemed to him to pass the bounds of melancholy and moodiness. He had, as we have seen, suffered from moods since he was a child. Indeed, even in that epoch, he was privileged as an artist to suffer from them without remark. Yet certainly 1866, the year of Rose's

refusal, of the shock of two deaths, and of a worrying piece of public business, had not done him any good. He was soon hovering about the verge of what we should now call a nervous breakdown. He says that he could often neither draw nor think to any good purpose, and sometimes publicly claims the privileges of an invalid.

There is no doubt that the time of probation with Rose hung very uneasily, and that her indecision proved in the highest degree unsettling to poor Ruskin. The people about him seem not to have been taken into his confidence as to the exact state of the case between him and Rose – at least it was far from being public property. For instance, William Rossetti notes in his diary that Howell has just told him that there appears a 'considerable prospect' of Ruskin's marrying again shortly. Howell, with an air of being prodigiously discreet, will not tell the lady's surname, but says that her Christian name is Rose.

A week or two afterwards William is again in company with Howell and the conversation once more turns on the affair. Howell tells William that she is a handsome girl of nineteen of considerable fortune, and proceeds with the curious legend that her affections have been aroused towards Ruskin 'by her learning at full the peculiar circumstances of his first marriage.' 'She is in love with him, and he with her,' William Rossetti's diary goes on, 'but her parents interpose objections, and she is at present precluded from corresponding with R.'

But though he was so unhappy, though he felt his health tottering, and though he could settle to nothing, Ruskin still felt obliged to try to carry on his political work. Political events made his feeling of obligation more or less justifiable.

The year before (1866) Gladstone, under the nominal Prime Ministership of Russell, had formed an alliance with John Bright, and in so doing had changed the character of the party of which he was leader. What had been the Whig,

THE MARKET PLACE, ABBEVILLE

From a drawing by John Ruskin

had become the Liberal party. The class consciousness, and the belief in a class war, with which the Chartist movement had begun eighteen years before, had died away. Politically the working class movement had now joined the rich, respectable middle-class Radicals. Both were struggling with the Tories for the extension of the franchise. Of this combined working and middle class movement, John Bright and Gladstone were the leaders, both in the House and in the country. In the first year of their alliance, these two brought forward a second Reform Bill, which proposed a very moderate amount of working-class enfranchisement. However, mild as it was, it was strong enough to split the party which produced it.

As soon as it was introduced, the Tories, with Disraeli at their head, were joined by Robert Lowe and a group of discontented Whig members – the celebrated 'Cave of Adullam.' Feeling ran high. Lowe did not mince his words and spoke and wrote continually. Every day people read in their newspapers his denunciation of a wider franchise on the ground of the moral and intellectual inferiority of the wage-earners to the ruling class. These daily pronouncements were in themselves enough to rouse Ruskin.

Lowe spoke most offensively, yet in a sense Ruskin was inclined to agree with him as to the facts. But Ruskin was not content to stop where Lowe stopped, but went on to ask whose fault this state of things might be: 'Who is most to blame, the unteaching or the untaught?' Ruskin blamed what he called 'the spending classes,' and averred that what they had bought with the money that had been entrusted to them was ignorance, and death.

Lowe roused not only Ruskin but the workers to anger. Monster outdoor demonstrations were held, in which members of the new trade unions joined with members of the middle class, and Bright's denunciations of a wicked and rapacious aristocracy were listened to with enthusiasm.

However, the Reform Bill, as the reader may remember, was defeated in the House: the Russell-Bright-Gladstone Government at once resigned, and Disraeli and the Tories took office without a dissolution.

It was then that Disraeli performed his most celebrated manœuvre, that of 'dishing the Whigs.' Ruskin might scorn voting, but the popular agitation for an extension of the franchise was growing, and could hardly be ignored, for riots were feared in many towns. The left wing of the Liberal party openly declared that the rejected Bill to be better dead only because it had not gone far enough. Queen Victoria was perturbed by the whole affair, and declared herself in favour of a settlement of the question.

Disraeli's solution of the whole business was to carry, by means of his Conservatives, and the left wing of the Liberals, a much stronger measure than had been thrown out the year before. 1867, then, saw not only far-reaching parliamentary reform, but reform which seemed to have been directly produced by popular agitation and tumult. Old-fashioned people were appalled, and the end of all peace and good order was certainly expected wherever white curls and white whiskers gathered round silver tea urns.

§ 2

It was natural, then, that Ruskin, who was sure that he had a message for the country, should feel it absolutely necessary to go on with his political writings. But the bad health of which we have spoken made him reluctant to cast his message in a formal shape. So he ended by writing *Time and Tide*, or rather by addressing a series of letters to one Thomas Dixon, of Sunderland, a cork-cutter, who is said to have had 'the ingenuity and simplicity of a child, and the tender, sympathetic heart of a woman.'[1] He seems in fact

[1] Cook's *Life of Ruskin*, Vol. II.

to have been in every respect the ideal and pattern of what Frederic Maurice felt that a working man should be, and the letters with which he meekly and charmingly responded to Ruskin show evidence of the greatest eagerness, goodwill, and muddle.

The exemplary cork-cutter seems to have written in the first instance to ask Ruskin's opinion on all agitation. What did such a learned gentleman think about parliamentary reform? Ruskin was emphatic, and quoted to Dixon what he had said a dozen years before on that very subject. He had asked the working men of England then, and he asked them now, whether they were quite certain that they had any opinions to represent? Whether they agreed on any single thing that they systematically wanted, beyond less work and more wages? He doubted whether even here they had formulated any idea of how much less work and how much more wages they believed possible. Had they made up their minds about emigration? Did they want England to become nothing but a 'large workshop and forge'?

Failing an answer to these somewhat rhetorical questions, Ruskin was of opinion that the agitation for a working class voice in the government of the country was absurd. He repeated his phrase, and said their voices were not worth a rat's squeak, either in Parliament or out of it, till they had some ideas to utter with them. . . .

Such questions cannot be debated in Parliament. . . . By all means let them be debated, but let the working classes debate them among themselves.

> [1]'Do you suppose you could get at the truth sooner in the House of Commons, where the only aim of many of the members would be to refute every word uttered in your favour, and where the settlement of any

[1] *Time and Tide, by Weare and Tyne.*

question whatever depends merely on the deliberations and the plans of conflicting interest?'

Why should not the 'working classes' indeed choose a Parliament of their own, and there debate, 'upon the possible modes of the regulation of industry, and the advisablest schemes for helpful discipline of life?' If any of the laws thus arrived at were incompatible with present laws or customs of trade, they were not to make a noise about them, 'nor embroider them on flags, nor call meetings in parks about them, in spite of railings and police.' They were rather to keep them in their thoughts 'as objects of patient purpose and future achievement by peaceable strength.'

This was a bleak prospect, but Ruskin goes on to rub in his advice and to amplify it, by telling the 'working classes' how little good a parliamentary majority would do them. Such a majority could not enforce 'any system of business broadly contrary to that now established by custom.' If, then, he is so sure that vested interest is ready to be a law-breaker, the reader may wonder if Ruskin is going to preach revolution to his exemplary cork-cutter? But no – he goes on to tell Mr. Dixon that if the working classes succeeded to-morrow in passing laws wholly favourable to themselves and unfavourable to the masters, 'the only result would be that the riches of the country would at once leave it, and you would perish in riot and famine.' This dogmatic statement was presumably to be a matter of faith to Mr. Dixon, for it is left unsupported.

The vanity of the ballot-box being thus comfortably established between them, Ruskin and his correspondent go on, in a discursive, desultory way, to erect a sort of ideal commonwealth. They build it between them in question and answer in a manner which corresponds almost exactly to the fantasy-building with which the psychologist is familiar.

The fantasy-builder, unable to achieve what he wants in

the real world, creates a world out of the more ductile material of imagination, and in this world he has his way and is obeyed.

'Jack shall have Jill,
Naught shall go ill,
The man shall have his mare again, and all shall be well.'

So they built, 'like to two artificial gods.'

Mr. Thomas Dixon would like to see guilds established in every town, where master and man may meet so as to avoid the temptations of the public-house and *drink*.

> 'And then let it be made a law, that every lad should serve an apprenticeship of not less than seven years to a trade or art, and let him prove his workmanship before the guild before he is allowed to become a member.'

Ruskin will not allow young people a licence to marry unless they have several years' good character to show. Then they shall be saluted with the titles of Bachelor and *Rosière*, and granted the privilege of marriage.

Dixon would see 'cash payment for all and everything needed in life,' for he is sure that 'credit is a curse to him that gives and him that takes it.' Then payment is to be by the hour instead of by the day. 'By the hour system not a single man need be idle.' 'It would give employment to all, and even two hours per day would realize more to a man than breaking stones.'

Ruskin will have all articles of trade and manufacture openly and clearly graded. He will have the books of all mercantile undertakings open to inspection. Dixon will back him up in his aristocratic hero-worship line.

> 'You and Carlyle seem quite agreed on the idea of the masterhood qualification. . . . I can assure you there

> is not an honest, noble working-man that would not by far (rather) serve under such masterhood than be the employee or workman of a co-operative store. Working-men do not as a rule make good masters. Neither do they treat each other with that courtesy as a noble master treats his working-men.'

Ruskin will have strict sumptuary laws, and there shall be no absentee landlords. Dixon will nationalize banking.

And so the game goes on, the two correspondents egging each other on to higher and higher flights, and to more and more rosy thoughts of what things were going to be like in *their* country.

A paragraph in one of Dixon's letters expresses pretty accurately the sensations that both correspondents got from their intercourse:

> 'I hail with pleasure and delight the shadowing forth by you of these noble plans for the future: I feel glad and uplifted to think of the good that such teaching will do for us all.'

§ 3

Very little record has been left of Ruskin's hopes and fears in another direction, or of how he felt during his three years' wait for Rose. According to Howell (an unreliable but this time a probable witness) the time was full of alternations and vicissitudes. Howell told Gabriel Rossetti, who told William Rossetti, who wrote it down in his diary, that he, Howell, was quite sure as early as 1868 that all Ruskin's chance of Rose had gone, and that his love affair was 'virtually over.'

Howell further recounted to the Rossetti brothers (in his usual mood of romantic self-glorification) that he went over to Ireland as Ruskin's emissary to try to get over 'certain

difficulties that had arisen,' that he went to the La Touches' house at Harristown disguised 'as a tramp or labourer' in order to obtain an interview. However, in spite of all these exertions he had been 'unable to effect the desired change of sentiment.'

Actually there is evidence in Ruskin's diary that he was corresponding with Rose. He notes a letter received from Ireland with the one word, 'Peace.'

§ 4

It has already been said that Ruskin spent the winter of 1867 quietly at home. But by May he is dating his letters from Winnington again. The winter's *tête-à-tête* with his mother had proved more than trying, and even the padding provided by the equable Joan Agnew was not always thick enough. For at eighty-eight Margaret Ruskin was still (in Mr. Benson's words) 'ruling her son and her household with inexorable kindness.'

She used, as has been related, to call down the table at dinner in her thin voice if she missed some remark that Ruskin may have made to his neighbour.

'John – John Ruskin, what was that you said?' When the remark had been respectfully repeated, she would often instantly contradict it. She would lay theological traps for the kindest and most harmless of her son's visitors.

> [1] 'I was sitting with her alone very happily (wrote Georgiana Burne-Jones) when she suddenly said, "Do you love God?" Overwhelmed with shyness at such a question, but feeling it would be a lie to say "No," I tried to appease the inquisition by the simplest form of what I meant, and humbly answered "Yes." On this reply she pounced with the unlooked-for exclama-

[1] *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones.*

tion "I don't!" and, while I shrank within myself, discoursed to me upon the arrogance of any creature daring to say such a thing about the Creator, so great and so far above us all. But I believe it was sheer love of contradiction that led her on.'

Sometimes her talent would be better employed, however. Howell would be entertaining Ruskin and Joan Agnew with his Münchhausen tales after dinner, when Mrs. Ruskin would throw down her netting with [1] 'How *can* you two sit there and listen to such a pack of lies!'

If Ruskin wanted, as he often did, to take a party to the theatre, his mother's permission had first to be asked. It was never very readily granted, and was often downright refused. On Sundays it was still the rule that Ruskin's Turners must be covered over with 'black shades.'

The worst of it was that the old woman was not entirely odious, being, for example, patriarchally good to her servants.

A girl visitor once asked Margaret Ruskin, in a moment of indiscretion, what one of the ancient servants did, for there were several without apparent occupation, she being chronically unwilling to turn off a servant. Mrs. Ruskin drew herself up and said, 'She, my dear, puts out the dessert.'

Anne, Ruskin's old nurse, who more than forty years before had sat in the dickey of Mr. Telford's borrowed carriage, was with them still. She gave Margaret Ruskin as good as she got, and had a genius for saying disagreeable things.

[2] 'When my mother and she got old together, and my mother became very imperative and particular about having her teacup set on one side of her little round table, Anne would observantly and punctiliously put

[1] Collingwood's *Life*. [2] *Præterita*.

it always on the other, which caused my mother to state to me, every morning after breakfast, gravely, that if ever a woman in this world was possessed by the Devil, Anne was that woman.'

But Margaret Ruskin could write to her son very kindly, almost submissively, for all that. There is a letter of hers dated August, 1869. 'My dearest,' it begins, 'I should be thankful to pay you with double interest the more than comfort and pleasure I have had, and I think latterly more than at any other times, from your letters.' She goes on to say how in spite of failing sight she always reads his letters herself, and how she is reading his *Queen of the Air* with a deeper and deeper sense of its merit. Ruskin still confided in her and told her a great deal of what was in his mind.

'I am unable (he writes to her that year) from any present crisis to judge what is best for me to do. There is so much misery and error in the world which I see I could have immense power to set various human influences against, by giving up my science and art, and wholly trying to teach peace and justice; yet my own gifts seem so specially directed towards quiet investigation of beautiful things that I cannot make up my mind, and my writing is as vacillating as my temper.'

§ 5

But for all his confidences, there was still that shrill voice echoing down the table at Denmark Hill, and demanding that he should give an account of himself. Ruskin, in short, was glad to get away to Winnington. He was presently, in May, 1868, to deliver a lecture in Dublin. It was perhaps too much to hope that Rose would be there, but for all that he took special pains with it. It was to be on 'The Mystery of Life and the Arts' – a title which clearly gave the lecturer

a good deal of scope. It was to have been given in the theatre of the Royal College of Science, but so great was the demand for tickets that the place was changed, and it was finally given in the Concert Hall of the Exhibition Palace to an audience of between two and three thousand people.

Whether, once in Ireland, he got to Harristown is not revealed by any of his biographers, or whether it was from Dublin that Howell purported to have set off on his troubadour expedition is never related.

Later in the year Ruskin was once again to speak on an occasion that had interest of another sort. He and Mr. Gladstone took part in a debate, organized by the Social Science Association, upon the subject of Trade Unions and Strikes. Here the orthodox speakers took the line that no sentiment ought to be brought into the subject of political economy. Man had carnivorous teeth and predatory instincts: the predatory instincts of man were the groundwork of sound political economy.

Ruskin spoke on this interesting subject, and later set out his views on unemployment in a pamphlet. 'No ultimate good,' he wrote, 'will be effected by any law which is based on the separation of the poor from other classes of society, as an object of scornful charity or as recipients of unearned relief.' He goes on practically to admit the principle of the 'Droit de Travaille' which had shocked him so much in the Paris of 1848. He feels, with Carlyle, the grotesqueness of unemployment while society still lacked a thousand things that labour can produce. He wants to see public works such as the development of roads and harbours and the reclamation of waste land put in hand. Why must all this richness of thews and sinews be wasted?

Such were the views he defended and promulgated on a committee which had been formed in the October of 1868, 'Of Persons interested in the subject of the Unemployed.' They seem to have been a purely voluntary debating society.

§ 6

Between these two bouts of political economy Ruskin went abroad, to Abbeville this time, so as not to be too far from his mother. Here the closest of his American friends, Professor Norton, joined him, and carried him off for a day or two to Paris, where they met Longfellow. They dined together at Meurice's and seem to have had a very successful evening of it, though perhaps Longfellow would not have somehow been quite pleased if he could have read over Ruskin's shoulders as he wrote in his diary afterwards: 'A quiet simple gentleman . . . rather grave and pleasant . . . not amusing, and strangely innocent and calm.'

Norton had brought his family with him to Europe on this occasion, and they had taken a rectory at Keston in Kent. Ruskin surrounded them with pleasant and fantastic attentions; he sent them choice food, lent them Turners to hang on the walls, which were dull, and was prodigal of all sorts of presents to the Norton children. Here Norton arranged a meeting between Ruskin and Darwin, two men who had not seen each other since they had both so narrowly missed breakfasting on 'a delicate toast of mice' at Professor Buckland's at Oxford thirty years earlier. Darwin and Ruskin, now both great men, liked each other only moderately, and no friendship resulted from the meeting, though they saw each other several times at this period.

CHAPTER XXVI

1869–1871: Aged 50–52

APPOINTMENT TO OXFORD

§ 1

Ruskin writes in his diary in the January of 1869 that he is much teased 'with too much to get into Abbeville lecture.' The phrase may stand for the motto of the year, for it was a year in which the usual rush and incoherence played its part. *The Queen of the Air*, which he composed in the spring, is supposed to be about Greek myths, and, to the surprise of author and reader, turns out to be largely about botany. It excited its contemporaries. Carlyle must see him instantly to tell him how much he likes it and what a blow for the right he felt it to be.

> 'Don't say "Most great thoughts are dressed *in shrouds*." Many, many are the Phœbus Apollo celestial arrows you still have to shoot into the foul Pythons, and poisonous abominable Megatheriums and Plesiosaurians that go staggering about large as Cathedrals, in our sunk Epoch again!'

'It is the best I ever wrote,' Ruskin told a correspondent – speaking of *The Queen of the Air* as he did of the majority of his works – 'The last which I took thorough, loving pains with, and the first I did in full knowledge of sorrow.'

Sorrow being represented by the death of his father and his refusal by Rose.

That autumn Ruskin travelled abroad again: this time he went farther, reaching indeed the terminus of the line which ended, as the reader will remember, at Venice. Here he made a discovery of which we shall hear more later. This new discovery was the painting of Carpaccio, whose sentiment and charm delighted him. This time it was to his mother that he wrote every day. He would give her his itinerary, and tell her how he is at work before breakfast, how he comes in to write letters at eleven, how he rests till three, and how clever his assistant, Mr. Bunney, is at doing coloured drawings of buildings.

One day he tells her how he has talked to Longfellow, who strolled up as he, Ruskin, was drawing in the square at Verona, when everything was bathed in a particularly beautiful soft light; and how he supposes that, if a photograph could have been taken just then, many people in England and America would have liked copies of it. A month after, when he is in Venice, he falls in with Holman Hunt, and they examine Tintorett's *Annunciation* in the Scuola di San Rocco. Once more it occurs to Ruskin that here is another subject for a photograph, and once more he expresses the thought to his mother. What would she have thought if anyone but John had expressed such vainglorious ideas to her?

The meeting between Ruskin and Hunt was not without interest, for it marks the end of the estrangement which Millais's friends and Ruskin's thought it necessary to keep up.

On his way back, Ruskin passed, of course, through that part of his line that lies through Switzerland. At Verona the river is 'a monstrous great dragon' that periodically ruins the peasants of the valley with its floods. Why, thinks Ruskin, should the waters not be caught while they are young and

weak, far up in the mountains, and 'educated,' in reservoirs on the hill-sides, till there are neither floods nor droughts?

> 'When I have done this for one hill-side, if other people don't do it for other hill-sides, and make the lost valleys of the Alps one paradise of safe plenty, it is their fault, not mine.'

He really made considerable efforts to carry out some such scheme for stopping the inundations of the Ticino and the Adige, seeing both engineers and capitalists, and telling them that if every field on the mountain-side had its pond, and every ravine had its reservoir, the devastation of alternate floods and droughts need never recur.

What apparently never occurred to Ruskin was that the physical part of his scheme was in reality pretty obvious, and that for the difficult psychological part, he was absolutely barren of suggestion, and could only, as usual, scold people for not doing their duty. There is something exasperating about this particular instance of his schoolmastering. It seems repellant unless we are prepared to look upon it as it would be looked upon by psycho-analysts. They lay stress on the sense of guilt that takes hold of natures like Ruskin's, and would probably hold that this was an instance of his endeavour to do penance. The emphasis should, they would probably hold, be laid on the sentence just quoted – 'If they don't it is their fault, not mine' – the desire being not so much to do good as to do (or offer to do) penance. We shall see this illustrated three years later in Ruskin's attitude to *Fors Clavigera*.

§ 2

Fortunately in the August of 1869, while he was abroad, a new scheme put an end to these vapourings about torrents. A letter reached him from England which set him off in a

much more suitable direction. Up to that year there had never been a Professor of Art at any of the English universities. Now came a request to Ruskin that he would fill the post of first Slade Professor at Oxford. Ruskin wrote at once accepting the appointment: he had always urged the establishment of such a Chair, and felt his own appointment as a high honour. He writes to his mother about it from Hospenthal in Switzerland.

> 'Here in the old Inn you know so well, under the grassy hill you used to be so happy climbing in the morning, I get a letter from my cousin George telling me I am the first professor of art appointed at the English Universities. Which will give me as much power as I can well use, and would have given pleasure to my poor father and therefore to me – once – and may yet give some pleasure to – someone who has given me my worst pain. I hope – quietly and patiently to be of very wide use in this position. I am *but just* ripe for it.'

In the February of 1870 Ruskin began his inaugural lectures at Oxford; they were lectures with whose composition he had taken immense pains. The five intervening months were spent at Denmark Hill in doing too much, and working at too many things, and in being too much snubbed, scolded and praised by his mother.

Ruskin himself thought that with an Oxford professorship he was entering upon a new period of his life, and took the opportunity of looking back over the last years – the years of his love for Rose, of his loss of faith in Christianity, and of his father's death. He sounds the familiar note of regret as he writes to a woman correspondent on Christmas Day.[1]

> '. . . It will be justest in you to blame either Fate or me myself, for all I suffer, and no other person. My

[1] Mrs. John Simon.

father – my mother – and R. have all done me much harm. They have all done me greater good. And they all three did the best for me they knew how to do. Would you have me, because my father prevented me from saving Turner's work, and because my mother made me effeminate and vain – and because R. has caused the strongest days of my life to pass in (perhaps not unserviceable) pain – abandon the three memories and loves? Or only the most innocent of the three? I am in a great strait about it now – whether to think of these ten years as Divine or Diabolical.'

§ 3

Ruskin's inaugural lecture at Oxford was to have been given in the Gothic museum which had cost its melancholy young architect so much pains – the museum over which Ruskin had laboured, and to which he had in the end – very properly – given such moderate praise. But, as usual when the lecturer was Ruskin, such crowds came to hear that the assembly had to be adjourned to the Sheldonian Theatre instead.

It was here then that the singular voice floated out again.[1] Ruskin began, as was his habit, in a low gentle tone to read a studied, exquisitely cadenced passage. His curiously sweet smile was never long absent from his face when he lectured, and the blue eyes shone, as though he borrowed some pleasure, some afflatus, from the packed and listening faces. He would hold up a diagram, a model, or a crystal, and then the long sleeve of his gown would fall away to show the delicate hands. Sometimes the gown and velvet cap – last remnant of the gentleman commoner – would be discarded, and the light homespun tweed of waistcoat and

[1] Frederic Harrison's *Life*, etc.

trousers and the old-fashioned frock-coat would be revealed. He would begin to speak quietly, as has been said.

Great art cannot grow up in a coarse and selfish world, he would plead; it would be hard for his listeners to become artists because of the circumstances of their time. Alas! They lived in an age of base conceit and baser servility – an age whose intellect was chiefly formed by pillage, and was occupied 'in desecrating one day, and mimicking the next day, the works of all the noble persons who made its intellectual or art life possible.'

As the lecture went on, Ruskin's voice would grow in volume, and as the prepared message came to an end, the pace would increase and his lambent wit would break out extempore. He would begin to walk up and down, the words would pour out faster: then he would drop again, but this time naturally and spontaneously, into one of the many majestic prose rhythms of which he was master. Even his physical presence seemed at such moments to be enlarged, and no one who heard him wondered, that, even in a day which could boast such orators as Gladstone, Bright and Disraeli, Ruskin should be called 'the most eloquent man in England.'

Then, as he drew near the end of his hour, he would stand still, the words would come more slowly and he would drop into the falling cadence of his peroration, as a sea-bird folds her wings, quietly coming to rest on the water. It was often several minutes after his silver voice had stopped, before an audience could collect itself enough to move or speak, much less to applaud.

§ 4

Ruskin at first lived while he was at Oxford with Acland and his family, and saw a good deal of Oxford society. Jowett, the Master of Balliol, with whom he used sometimes

to dine, was not quite sure if he liked him. There was too much enthusiasm, too much æstheticism! Then Ruskin's economics shocked him. He was of course not insensible to Ruskin's genius, or to his noble character – or so he said – but on the whole he found Ruskin distinctly trying.

> 'Once after dinner, when Ruskin was seated in the drawing-room talking to a lady, Jowett, who stood with other friends in front, suddenly broke into a hearty ringing laugh. Ruskin sprang up and caught him by both hands: "Master, how delighted I am to hear you! I wish I could laugh like that!" Upon which all the room laughed, except Jowett.'[1]

After spending the first academic year with Acland, Ruskin was made an honorary fellow of Corpus, and was given rooms in the fellows' buildings, looking out over the meadows. But his removal there was not made till a good deal of water had flowed down the river.

§ 5

Ruskin felt that he had been a success at Oxford, and the Tour this year was unusually agreeable. He went with a party of congenial disciples, and, though conscious of now being 'The Professor,' and feeling that he probably ought to make studies, he gave himself a holiday and very much enjoyed the pleasure of his party.

Norton had taken a big villa at Sienna, and here Ruskin joined him. They talked, and saw the sights and sketched. Norton writes that Ruskin was in excellent spirits, that 'all the sunshine and sweetness of his nature were given free play.' He goes on to say that no guest could have added more to the pleasure of the household.

On the way home the whole party broke the journey in

[1] Cook's *Life of Ruskin.*

Switzerland, and for a fortnight of the July of 1870 they enjoyed the mountain air and the mountain walks. It was while they were here that France declared war on Germany. Their German waiter was called up, and, as they would have to pass through regions which would probably soon be part of the theatre of war, the whole party at once hurried home. They had to travel through a France that an incompetent and cumbersome mobilization had made a scene of extraordinary muddle.

That August was a month of suspense to everybody; Ruskin studied that most rapid and dramatic of campaigns with a sort of fascinated horror. As a disciple of Carlyle, he had already interested himself in the technique of battles, but now he had a more painful interest in studying the course of the war. Day by day he worked at the British Museum, studying the coins with which he meant to illustrate his next course of lectures on Greek sculpture. Day by day he leant over his maps. The German armies marched on inexorably over the country that he knew so well, and Ruskin would wonder how this, or that, beautiful building was likely to get on in case of a bombardment. His sympathies were with the French, but he had too much sense to join a number of æsthetic English people who wanted him to protest against the German ravages. Ruskin knew very well that they were inevitable, and had enough knowledge of history to know that the Germans were behaving well on the whole. France had asked for the war, and had got it. This sound of guns, loud enough to split her ears, was a most likely echo to the cry of 'À Berlin!' which she had raised little more than a month earlier.

Ruskin was back at Oxford when news came that Strasbourg had been invested. Strasbourg had a magnificent cathedral, a library, and picture galleries. Then came the news that it was being bombarded, while the main German army was marching on Paris.

By January, 1871, Paris was besieged. At first the Germans avoided a bombardment, but a cannonade was always in their power, and sooner or later seemed inevitable. It seemed to Ruskin unbelievably horrible that, in what every one round him called an age of progress, the Sainte Chapelle and the Louvre should actually be under fire; nor did he forget, as did some æsthetes, the human suffering that walked the Paris streets.

He subscribed towards a Paris Food Fund, and joined the Mansion House Committee which organized it. Ruskin had little heart to talk about art, and this term the Slade Professor only gave three rather perfunctory lectures on landscape. The Franco-Prussian War seemed to Ruskin to be the typical and horrible outcome of the new age of industrialism and callous vulgarity. But England did not listen to his denunciations, for she was making money while they fought.

CHAPTER XXVII

1871: Aged 52

FORS CLAVIGERA AND MARGARET RUSKIN'S DEATH

§ 1

> 'For my own part,' writes Ruskin in the first number of *Fors Clavigera*, 'I will put up with this state of things, passively, not an hour longer. I am not an unselfish person, nor an Evangelical one; I have no particular pleasure in doing good, neither do I dislike doing it so much as to expect to be rewarded for it in another world. But I simply cannot paint, nor read, nor look at minerals, nor do anything else that I like, and the very light of the morning sky, when there is any – which is seldom, nowadays, near London – has become hateful to me, because of the misery that I know of, and see signs of . . .'

It was an evil decade that was ended, he goes on, and a more evil decade seemed in store. The French and Germans had been at war since the previous July (1870), the Emperor of the French had been captured at Sedan, and, when he wrote, Paris had been invested for over three months, and famine and disease walked in her streets; England was neutral, but she went in deadly fear because her conscience troubled her. She feared not only the Prussians and the Russians, but the

Americans, Hindus, Chinese, and Kaffirs. And why not? Had England ever had any desire respecting these nations except to make money out of them? At home Ruskin saw the working class starving in the midst of the luxury and dissipation of the upper class; abroad there was war. It was a dismal prospect.

The monthly writing of a 'Letter to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain,' and later the formation of the St. George's Guild, have been likened to the paying of a kind of Danegeld by Ruskin. If he did this task, if he set aside a tenth of his income, then (in what time he had over) he would be free to paint, and draw, and stare at the sky with a free conscience, as he used to find himself doing in dreams.

He began, as has been said, to publish his letters in the January of 1871, and called them *Fors Clavigera*, or *Fortune with the Nail*. Before old age, and his increasing doses of nervous breakdown, put an end to the task, he had written over six hundred thousand words of odd, brilliant, and often incomprehensible satire and exhortation. The name he gave his work is, as usual, obscure. Some time before, when Ruskin had been at Mornex, he had seen a bronze mirror-case in some museum; on it was the figure of the Fate, Atropos. She was shown hammer in hand, and on the point of driving a nail fast home. Ruskin in his diary had noted this as 'the symbol of unalterably determined or fixed fate.' In *Munera Pulveris*, too, Ruskin speaks of the 'fixed majesty of Necessitas with her iron nails.'

Such, in the opinion of Messrs. Cook and Wedderburn (compilers of the vast and admirable Library Edition), is the primary origin of the singular syllables with which Ruskin addressed the 'Labourers and Workmen of England.'

As he wrote, and as he mused, the name took on a hundred shapes. *Fors* was made to stand for Force and Fortitude, as well as Fortune, and the nail became also either a key or a

club. Then to each of these meanings Ruskin attached a particular hero: Hercules is a type of the 'first Fors' and Ulysses of the second. There is no end to the convolutions of the Cretan labyrinth that he built of the syllables: the meanings shift and coil like serpents, or the mists at Delphi – as intricate, as bewilderingly turned back upon itself, is the thread of the discourse.

Fors Clavigera, when finally its numbers are all gathered together, forms a book of an unevenness of quality not easily to be matched even in the licentious literature of England. There is something to weary and annoy every class of reader in it: it is verbose, preachy and diffuse, it is scolding, sentimental and self-laudatory to an unbearable degree. Yet amid the welter of old nails, in this junkshop of half-thought-out ideas, there flash out passages of wit and satire that are unmatched save perhaps by Swift – passages of eloquence that equal De Quincey's or Pater's, while for limpid playfulness, Santayana and Logan Pearsall Smith are rivalled.

What stirs Ruskin month by month to satire is the reading day by day, in the *Morning Post*, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and other respectable newspapers, about the unbounded prosperity of England. Ruskin had been to Manchester and Bradford, and, unlike some of the business men of the day, he had eyes in his head as well as in the itching palms of his hands. They said England was rich, he knew her to be poor. When a correspondent calls him to task for the extravagance of his mediæval recipe for goose-pie, and tells him that meat must always be stewed for the sake of economy, and when he reads elsewhere an arraignment of the wastefulness of open fires for the poor, Ruskin pounces.

So! In this age of prosperity Englishmen can no longer afford either the traditional roasts on the traditional fires, and it would be more to the point if Mr. Ruskin taught the poor to live on economical stews and soups, would it? Then

hadn't the English, in view of the increasing prosperity of the country, better learn to live on bread made half with clay like the Otomac Indians, and on the flesh of crocodiles?

> 'We have surely brickfield enough to keep our clay from rising to famine prices in any fresh access of prosperity; and though fish cannot live in our rivers, the muddy waters are just of the consistence crocodiles like; and at Manchester and Rochdale I have observed the surface of the streams smoking, so we need be under no concern as to temperature.'

In fact, was it not generally time that St. George should salt down his dragon, and to let the people of England say, 'For what we are about to receive let the Lord make us truly thankful'?

Why should we not, instead of cutting down our domestic expenditure, reduce what we spent on armaments and make up our minds to see that famous gun, the Woolwich Infant, less well fed, and the veritable Wapping infants better fed?

Ruskin sees sandwichmen advertising something or other in the street. Can there be anything more degrading than for a man to walk the streets 'flattened between two lies'?

But he doubts if anyone will heed him if the labourers and workmen that he is now addressing do not. He almost despairs of the others, the 'spending classes,' as he calls them. They are frivolous and only bent on enjoyment. 'For the last hundred years the upper classes of Europe have been one large picnic party.'

§ 2

The method of publication was hardly less curious than the contents of *Fors Clavigera*. Each letter was printed as a separate pamphlet and bound in grey paper. As an 'advertisement' on the cover announced, they were 'for the present

only sold by Mr. George Allen, Heathfield Cottage, Keston, Kent.'

> 'They will be sold for sevenpence each, without abatement on quantity, and forwarded, post paid, on remittance of the price of the number required. . . . I send a copy of each to the principal journals and periodicals, to be noticed or not at their pleasure; otherwise I shall use no advertisements.'

To tell the truth, the 'principal journals and periodicals' did not care much for the little grey pamphlets. The *Spectator* found them 'full of watery and rambling verbiage' and of 'silly and violent language.'

Time, however, and forty or more of the grey pamphlets helped to soothe the *Spectator*, and its leader writer was to speak of him again, three years later, in a slightly kinder strain.

> 'Sometimes he lets his intellect work and fires off pamphlet after pamphlet on political economy, each one more ridiculous than the last, till it ceases to be possible even to read his brochures, without condemning them as utterances of a man who cannot lose a certain eloquence of expression, BUT WHO CANNOT THINK AT ALL; and then again he lets his genius work and produces something which raises the admiration of the reader till every folly which preceded it is forgotten.'

'The inconsequence of Mr. Ruskin's mind is as evident as its radical benevolence,' concludes the critic.

§ 3

It was in the April of 1871 that Joan Agnew, who had rolled her sensible self firmly into a sort of wadding to keep

Ruskin's and his mother's sharp corners from intolerable contact, withdrew herself from Denmark Hill and married Mr. Arthur Severn.[1] Ruskin's biographers do not tell us very much about the courtship, nor whether Ruskin, to whom Joan's loss would be a very real one, helped or hindered. We know, however, that misfortune soon followed. It was not long after Joan had left the house, that Ruskin came back to find that Anne, his old nurse – she who had been said to be possessed of the Devil – was dead. It can be guessed that the pious Ruskin felt the loss, especially as his mother's failing health made her old servant's death a warning and a harbinger. The spring and early summer had been cold and dismal, a meagre March had been succeeded by a sullen April, and a bitterly cold, dark May and June. The year seemed to wear a grey shroud. To add to his anxieties Joan, now Mrs. Severn, got rheumatic fever on her honeymoon, and became very ill. The news from Paris was agitating; the Republic had been overset; the Commune seemed to lack strength to be born. Thiers, President of the Republic, was invoking the help of the Prussians to crush the Commune. Once more Paris was being shelled.

But no one can doubt that the key to the worst of the year's anxieties for Ruskin is to be sought in the date. Rose, when the three years were over, had asked once more for time, but this was the year in which she had again promised to give her decision.

Things did not, to say truth, look very hopeful. Rose was not well. She had always had bad headaches: now she had had a threat of 'brain fever,' a term which was used in all sorts of senses. She had become extremely restless and was always wanting change. Above all, a little book of poems that she had published the year before showed how much the religious motive still kept its place. She was melancholy, and felt she had 'lost much that she never had.' She tried to

[1] Son of 'Keats's Severn,' whom the Ruskins had known in Rome in 1840.

resign herself to the will of God. Though the time of probation was past, she had remained still irresolute. She genuinely shrank from the idea of being 'yoked with an unbeliever,' and still her mother opposed the match, and told her that he was a bad man. Yet sometimes she would see him in some friend's house and seem kind. What ought she to do and think? It seemed impossible to believe all that her mother said about her poor St. Crumpet.

§ 4

Ruskin chose Matlock that year for his summer holiday. It was impossible to go abroad. Things were too disturbed. The Commune was at last defeated in Paris, and now the papers were full of tales of the atrocities that had been perpetrated by the Reds before they were got under, of organized bands of female furies who poured petrol on the burning houses, of roasted gendarmes, and poisoned drinking fountains. M. Thiers's Government, now re-established, were meantime executing children of fourteen, twelve, ten, and even seven, in the name of Law and Order. Twenty-eight thousand prisoners filled all the forts and prisons of France. The executions had not been counted yet. But it had been admitted by the Republican Government that severe measures had been necessary. At Matlock, in a cold, dark, dry July Mr. Severn and the convalescent Joan joined Ruskin. The weather was no better than it had been earlier in the year; a biting wind blew. Day after day broke cold and dismal. The sky was covered with a black veil, but no rain fell. Ruskin was working as hard as ever, sketching out of doors as usual, and making studies that he meant to use in his Oxford course in the autumn.

One morning, when he was thus out – early before breakfast – he caught a stomach chill, the chill developed – his state of nerves and overwork made that almost inevitable –

and in a few days he was seriously ill. His friend Dr. Acland, Mrs. Severn, Lady Mount Temple and a number of other people united to nurse him. He grew worse, the newspapers began to publish daily bulletins, and for some time it seemed doubtful if he would recover.

> 'I knew very thoroughly how ill I was: I have not been so near the dark gates since I was a child.'

Cook says that the illness at Matlock, unlike later maladies, was only physical. Nevertheless, Ruskin dreamed strangely and pleasantly of St. Francis, of a divinely singing Italian woman, and of seeing the bronze horses at St. Mark's putting on their harness. He was a tiresome patient, full of whims, and difficult to nurse – once, for instance, demanding, and getting, cold roast beef and mustard at two in the morning. At last, however, he began to get better.

His mind, as he began to recover, turned to the Lakes, and to the charming and remote Coniston particularly. He had travelled there once before from Matlock. He spoke of going there when he was better, and of the 'healing waters of Coniston.'

It was then that someone brought him the news that there was a cottage there for sale, named Brant (or steep) Wood. The cottage, and its sixteen acres of copse and moorland, lay tucked out of the way of floods on the eastern side of Coniston Water. It had belonged to a man of the name of Linton, an engraver, who had had ideas not so very unlike Ruskin's own, and who had written 'God and the People' over his doorway.

Ruskin bought this cottage, without ever seeing it, for £1,500, and went there for the first time when he was convalescent.

It was thus casually that he acquired Brantwood, the house and piece of ground that was to be his home for the last twenty-five years of his life. The house was, when he

bought it, 'a mere shed of rotten timber and loose stones,' in Ruskin's opinion. Canon Rawnsley, in his *Ruskin and the English Lakes*, on the other hand, calls it 'a rough-cast, sturdily built Westmorland cottage.' But Canon Rawnsley must always take a rosy view. Ruskin, anyhow, thought otherwise of its quality.

> 'The house itself! Well, there *is* a house, certainly, and it has rooms in it; but I believe in reality nearly as much will have to be done as if it were a shell of bricks and mortar.'

Ruskin, when he had bought it, immediately had repairs and alterations put in hand, and then 'for old acquaintance' sake,' went to his father's old upholsterer in London 'instead of to the country Coniston one, as I ought.' Some authorities say that he gave the said upholsterer *carte-blanche*. At any rate, there was very little supervision, and he was naturally very much overcharged by the London firm. He never quite got over £5 which they made him pay for a single footstool. Altogether the cottage cost him nearly another £2,500.

But the journey from Matlock to Coniston was not enough for Ruskin. The restlessness that was in him drove him on, to Melrose, to Stirling, even to Perth of many memories, on his way to stay with the Hilliards at Abbeythune. The papers were still shocking reading and France full of the executions of Communards and of accusations and counter-accusations. Some people said that Thiers had had thirty thousand Communards shot. At last the Republican Government announced the official figures as twenty thousand.

§ 5

By the first week in October Ruskin was at home again with his mother. She was obviously failing, and Ruskin,

who had meant to go on to Oxford to deliver his autumn term lectures, stayed on at Denmark Hill with her and gave no course that term.

She was ninety years old, and her son's danger at Matlock had greatly distressed her. Now that he was safe at home with her, she had no power of recovery left. Dr. Henry Acland came to see her, but there was nothing to be done: she was obviously dying. Ruskin quailed before the spectacle of gradual dissolution. His father had died within a week of becoming ill: this business was new and shocking to him. 'The sinking of all back to the bleak Mechanism, was difficult to bear the sight of.'

She seemed to be unconscious during the last days that Ruskin found so cruel, but her appearance was continually that of restless pain. She died on December 5, 1871. At last, in her son's words, her hand lay on her breast 'as prettily as if Mino of Fiesole had cut it.'

'There is no human sorrow like it,' wrote Ruskin long afterwards.

> 'The father's loss, however loved he may have been, yet can be in great part replaced by friendship with old and noble friends. The mother's is a desolation which I could not have conceived till I felt it. When I lost my mistress, the girl for whom I wrote *Sesame and Lilies*, I had no more – nor have ever had since nor shall have – any joy in exertion. But the loss of my mother took from me the power of rest.'

PART IV

CHAPTER XXVIII

1871: Aged 52

THE NARRATIVE INTERRUPTED—*FORS CLAVIGERA*

'Ruskin's political message to the cultured society of his day, the class to which he himself belonged, began and ended in this simple judgment, "You are a parcel of thieves. . . ." He never went away from that, and he enforced it with a very extraordinary power of invective.'

Bernard Shaw

§ 1

The buying of Brantwood, the irresolute end of Rose's period of probation, Ruskin's illness at Matlock, and the death of his mother, all mark the end of an epoch. Though Ruskin went on outwardly much as usual for a year or two – the Slade lectures, often brilliant, and *Fors*, no less inconsequent and eloquent – the student of his life becomes aware that, in his early fifties, Ruskin begins to lose ground. At first his life follows the same pattern, except that growth has ceased. But this seems to mean that he does things less well. Experience is not making up for the natural loss of fire. In an age of grand old men, and of prime-ministers of eighty, Ruskin has begun to flicker, before he is half-way between fifty and sixty. There is 'Du Côté de Chez Guermantes' and there is 'Du Côté de Chez Swann.' There is plenty of fitful brilliance. There are Tours and Lectures. Above all, there is *Fors* and the new Guild of St. George. There is the same cry of too many irons in the fire, the same

praise by enthusiastic ladies, the same uneasy shifting from foot to foot of men like Jowett and Matthew Arnold.

During the seven years that follow 1871 Ruskin's nature becomes more of a battle-field, there is less hope of a new life, more sense of failure, and more of the applause of fools. Rose's health breaks down completely and she dies. When he is fifty-nine Ruskin has a long period of being downright, admittedly mad.

At last, in the 'eighties, the attacks of mania crowd quickly one upon another. Ruskin is defeated, spent, exhausted, and only half alive. Finally there comes the last Brantwood period – the sad eleven years' wait, of which Marcel Proust was to write so beautifully.

The last quarter of the story, which ends with the pale simulacrum in the bath-chair, seems to the present writer to be worth tracing, even if we feel sure (as we must after the period that has now been reached) that a tragic ending is inevitable. Ruskin's was a strong spirit. Again and again in the last years he flashes out into uncommon brightness. If he could not save himself, if experience is a light that only shines on the wake of the ship, Ruskin can yet shout to us through the storm.

He is Captain Ahab, pursuing he knows not what spirit of evil – what white whale – a being like Ahab himself, possessed by he knows not what strange genius.

It is an old tragedy: the human spirit is at war, tossed hither and thither, suffering, defying, and in the end perishing. This time the tale is told, not by a Herman Melville, but by a Racine. Everything is suppressed. There is no fine expressive backcloth of towering seas and tattered cloud. Everything is trivial; the light is not that of a storm gleam, but of a line of street lamps. The elements are quiet; till the last scene is reached and sunset gilds the room where he lies dead, they will tell us nothing about the passions and conflicts that are raging. The glare of burning Paris

has died down. *Ouvrier* and *pétroleuse* have fallen under Thiers's bullets, and the story will have no more 'effects.'

Yet here, in a gas-lit suburban drawing-room, by Rose's death-bed, or on the quiet moors at Brantwood, human passions and uncertainties are able to tear as cruelly as the fury of a whale, and to overwhelm as surely as the terrible sea into which Melville externalized them.

It is when the story is set in plush, when the tragedy is enacted 'between a Turkey carpet and a Titian' (to borrow Ruskin's words), that there creeps in an element of satire that barbs the nails of fate more delicately than Tee Queeg could barb his harpoon. The rich cultivated Victorians tried to fence themselves from the tragic and the terrible. By never mentioning this, by hushing up that, and sliding over the other, the well-bred, quiet-voiced, rich *intelligentsia* of England tried to make ladies of the Fates. 'Ein feste Burg ist unser South Kensington,' they said to themselves. They made little genteel jokes, and were cultivated and harmless. Surely destiny would not have the heart to 'hit them over the head with a coffin-end'? [1] At least they could see to it that their tragedies should be all muted by the upholsterers. In the 'seventies it is bad form for the victim on the rack of doubt, failure and despair, to cry out: if he does, his voice is drowned, not in kettle-drums, but in plush.

Lady Ritchie expresses the proper contemporary attitude exactly in her essays on *Tennyson*, *Ruskin*, *and Browning*. She is in ecstasies of admiration or surprise at everything. . . . This man is so high-souled: she has only seen him once, and then he was kneeling in church. She goes to see Ruskin at Brantwood, and is scarcely in at the door before she is charmed and astonished. What! Ruskin has an umbrella-stand like other people? How simple and delightful! Canon Rawnsley, too, loves 'the dear Professor,' and is just as ecstatic as Lady Ritchie in showing us Ruskin

[1] Ruskin's phrase.

clapping his hands over a piece of brass *repoussé* work that those clever lads down in the village have made.

But for all their plush, Ruskin did cry out. He could and he did, speak and call to us. For all the falsity and the silliness, there is a note of genuine passion: we hear the authentic voice. He felt profoundly, and he expressed himself magnificently. He could write about the human heart, or about the larger struggles of man with his fate, with strange beauty and insight.

§ 2

Like all the politically-minded men of his time – including Marx – Ruskin thought some sort of popular rising was immediate even in England. The Commune was thought to be only a harbinger. This is how Ruskin writes of what they believe is going to happen.

> [1] 'Now the ranks are gathering, on the one side of men rightly informed and meaning to seek redress by lawful and honourable means only; and on the other of men capable of compassion, and open to reason, but with personal interests at stake so vast, and with all the gear and mechanism of their acts so involved in the web of past iniquity, that the best of them are helpless and the wisest blind.'

It seems to Ruskin that the life of London revolves in an empty destructiveness, a maelstrom of iron railings, vulgar upholstery, jewels, toys and dissipation, fantastic as a dream.

> [2] 'Hyde Park in the season is the great rotatory form of a vast squirrel cage; round and round it go the idle company in their reversed streams, urging themselves to their necessary exercise . . . that they may with

[1] *Fors Clavigera*. [2] *Ibid.*, Letter 44.

safety eat their nuts. Then they retire to their boxes with due quantity of straw, the Belgravian and Piccadillian streets outside the railings being, when one sees clearly, nothing but the squirrel's box at the side of his wires. Then think of the rest of the metropolis as the creation and ordinance of these squirrels, that they may squeak and whirl to their satisfaction and yet be fed. . . . . There is Islington, Pentonville, Vauxhall, Lambeth, the Borough, Wapping and Bermondsey and the lugubrious march of the Waterloo Road. . . . . These streets are indeed what they (the spending classes) have built, their inhabitants are the people they have chosen to educate. They took the bread, milk, and meat, from the people of the fields, and with it they retain in their service this fermenting mass of unhappy human beings – news-mongers, novel-mongers, picture-mongers, lust- and death-mongers.'

He can be ironic as well as denunciatory.

The *Spectator* has just again declared the prosperity of England.

> 'The country is once more getting rich, the money is filtering downwards to the actual workers.'

Ruskin asks, not impertinently, what the *Spectator* means by 'rich.' Economic ideas seem to him generally confused, he says, for besides finding this pearl in a London paper, he has been scolded by a Liverpool paper for spending his money on pictures. He doubts if his contemporaries have any idea of how money should be spent, or even whether they can tell if it really exists.

> [1] 'I am not to buy pictures, then, it seems with my thirsty pounds; minerals are perhaps better? You like

[1] *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 4.

to be kept in mines and tunnels and occasionally blown hither and thither or crushed flat?'

'What *shall* I buy, then, with the next thirty pieces of gold I can scrape together? Precious things have been bought and sold before now for thirty pieces, even of silver. The over-charitable person who was bought to be killed at that price, indeed, advised the giving of alms.'

But the political economists will not have that nowadays, he goes on, nor even the philanthropists. 'All the clergy in London have been shrieking against almsgiving to the lower poor all this winter long.'

'I am obliged whenever I want to give anyone a penny to look up and down the street first to see if a clergyman's coming. . . . Of course I might buy as many iron railings as I please and be praised, but I've no room for them. I can't well burn any more coals than I do, because of the blacks which spoil my books; and the Americans won't let me buy any blacks alive, or else I would have some black dwarfs with parrots such as one sees in the pictures of Paul Veronese. I should like of course myself, above all things, to buy a pretty white girl with a title – and could get great praise for doing that.'

But sometimes he doubts if he has any money at all, and he proceeds to analyse a few of his financial arrangements.

'I have seven thousand pounds in what we call the Funds. . . . All I can see of them is a square bit of paper with some ugly printing on it, and all that I know of them is that this bit of paper gives me the right to tax you every year and make you pay me two hundred pounds out of your wages: which is very

> pleasant for me; but how long will you be pleased to do so? Suppose it should occur to you any summer's day that you had better not. Where would my seven thousand pounds be? In fact, where are they now? . . . This money of mine has no real existence, it only means that you, the workers, are poorer by two hundred a year than you would be if I had not got it.'

Then there is his land at Greenwich, where 'an ingenious person' has found that he can make chimney-pots out of the clay.

> 'Every quarter he brings me fifteen pounds off the price of his chimney-pots, so that I am always sympathetically glad when there is a high wind. . . . Is the country any the richer because, when anybody's chimney-pot is blown down in Greenwich, he must pay something to me before he can put it on again?'

There is also his house property in Marylebone to consider. He has the right to keep anybody from living in the houses unless they will pay him rent. How is England the richer for that? What, after all, is Ruskin's whole property except 'a chronic abstraction from other people's earnings'?

People sometimes ask him, he says, what would happen to the poor middleman if St. George's Guild had its way.

> [1] 'If you really saw the middleman at his work, you would not ask that twice. Here's my publisher, Mr. Allen, gets tenpence a dozen for his cabbages; the consumer pays threepence each. That is to say, you pay for three cabbages and a half, and the middleman keeps two and a half for himself, and gives you one.'
>
> 'Suppose you saw this financial gentleman, in bodily presence, toll-taking at your door – that you bought

[1] *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 75.

three loaves, and saw him pocket two, and pick the best crust off the third as he handed it in; that you paid for a pot of beer, and saw him drink two-thirds of it and hand you over the pot and sops – would you long ask, then, what was to become of him?'

The *Graphic*, in the July of 1871, printed a double-page engraving of Her Majesty's State concert,[1] and on the next page a picture of Paris after the barricades, with *pétroleuse* and *ouvrier* being haled off to prison, and later some comic strips of British tourists being taken round the dilapidated streets.

[2] 'Did you chance, my friends (Ruskin writes), any of you, to see, the other day, the 83rd number of the *Graphic*, with the picture of the Queen's concert in it? All the fine ladies sitting so trimly, and looking so sweet, and doing the whole duty of woman – wearing their fine clothes gracefully; and the pretty singer, white-throated, warbling "Home, sweet home" to them, so morally, and melodiously! Here was yet to be our ideal of virtuous life, thought the *Graphic*! Surely, we are safe back with our virtues in satin slippers and lace veils; – and our Kingdom of Heaven is come again, *with* observation, and crown diamonds of the dazzlingest. Cherubim and Seraphim in toilettes de Paris – (blue-de-ciel – vert d'olivier-de-Noé – mauve de colombe-fusillée) dancing to Coote and Tinner's band; and vulgar Hell shall be didactically portrayed, accordingly; – Wickedness going its way to *its* poor Home – bitter-sweet. Ouvrier and petroleuse – prisoners at last – glaring wild on their way to die. Alas! of these divided races, of whom one was appointed to teach and guide the other, which has indeed sinned deepest – the

[1] See plate facing this page.

[2] *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 8.

HER MAJESTY'S STATE CONCERT, 1871

From 'The Graphic'

> unteaching, or the untaught? – which now are guiltiest – these, who perish, or those – who forget?'

Cardinal Manning began to read *Fors* after something over a dozen numbers had appeared, and he tells Ruskin that it is like 'the beating of one's heart in a nightmare.'

> 'You are crying (he writes) out of the depths of this material world, and no man will listen. You can now understand what we feel. We cry and cry, but the nineteenth century looks upon us as deaf and impassive as the young Memnon. There are no breaks in the horizon to let us out into infinity. We are hedged in by the three per cents, ironclads, secularism, and deified civil powers. The God of this world has got his way for a time.'

Ruskin answers him, telling him that he has kept his gracious letter where, when he was younger and happier, he used to keep his love-letters. But has he not a grievance far more than the legitimate shepherds? Why does not the Cardinal do something to 'cart the slough away'?

> [1] 'I am a lost sheep and can only bleat. . . . It's all very well for people who have got crosses to carry and backs to carry them, but I've got at present neither cross (except of my own carpentering) nor back.'

[1] Shane Leslie's *Life of Cardinal Manning*.

CHAPTER XXIX

1871: Aged 52

THE NARRATIVE INTERRUPTED

'If you read Sociology, not for information, but for entertainment (small blame to you), you will find that the nineteenth-century poets and prophets who denounced the wickedness of our Capitalism exactly as the Hebrew prophets denounced the Capitalism of their own time, are much more exciting to read than the economists and writers on political science who worked out the economic theory and political requirements of Socialism. Carlyle's *Past and Present* and *Shooting Niagara*, Ruskin's *Ethics of the Dust* and *Fors Clavigera*, William Morris's *News from Nowhere* . . . Dickens's *Hard Times* and *Little Dorrit* are notable examples; Ruskin in particular leaving all the professed Socialists, even Karl Marx, miles behind in force of invective. Lenin's criticisms of modern Society seem like the platitudes of a rural dean in comparison.'

Bernard Shaw

'For indeed I myself am a Communist of the old school, reddest also of the red.'

Ruskin, Fors Clavigera, Letter 7

§ 1

So far only a few passages have been quoted from *Fors Clavigera*. These passages were chosen for their eloquence or wit, and to show the state of passionate protest in which their author found himself. Whether the source of his unhappiness were the history of his epoch, or that of his own life, the reader will decide for himself.

It is in either case time now to give the reader a short idea of what *Fors Clavigera* was like, what were the political and economic doctrines that Ruskin advocated in it, and what it was that Ruskin tried to do with his St. George's Guild. The last subject, though it is likely to exasperate the reader

(unless his taste is entirely ironic), must be touched upon, unless much of Ruskin's later activities are to be incomprehensible.

To begin with *Fors*. One of the first things that is noticeable about it, is its intimate style. Except in a few such purple passages as have been quoted, the rolling periods have gone. Ruskin is trying to get upon personal terms with his readers, he adopts a fireside manner – will break off an economic argument to tell you how the steamers are hooting and whistling outside his rooms in Venice, how a hoar-frost lies on the trees and brambles at Coniston. He interrupts a passage from Froissart to say that the Bonne at the Hôtel Meurice has just told him that he is keeping his room too hot . . . a fact which illustrates this or that.

The discursiveness of *Fors* was certainly deliberate at first, and the reader is sure that Ruskin knows very well what he is about. But because his excursions are begun deliberately, that is not to say that sometimes wit, and sometimes the curious bird's-nest quality of his mind, did not carry him far beyond his intentions. Nothing, for instance, but impending madness can surely excuse his making the 'Workmen and Labourers of England' overhear a dispute between him and Professor Tyndal about glaciers.

§ 2

Ruskin's object in writing *Fors* was to preach against the capitalist principles which were being practised with such fanatical purity in the England of his day, and to advocate the setting up of a state of society here very much like that which has been established in Russia (1928).

There are as a rule only two sorts of State postulated by the reformer: The first is a society in which such ideas as those of Tolstoy are dominant, a society founded on humanitarianism, simplicity, pacificism, and equality. The other is

the authoritarian State as now realized by the Russian Communist Party. Here there is discipline, and if necessary coercion. Because certain common values are reversed, because society is classless, all men and all functions are not considered equally valuable, while there is an alertness which is almost military. It was this second sort of ideal society which Ruskin tries to paint, and would like to establish.

There is one difference, however, between Ruskin's State, as he sets it out in *Fors Clavigera*, and that of the Communist parties of to-day. Ruskin did not even hope, or expect, that the ultimate, ineffable State of good behaviour would ever be reached, the State in which the lion lies down with the lamb, and laws become unnecessary. Ruskin does not apparently ever hope that the State can be superseded. He believes in authority, and disbelieves in democracy, he believes in a ruling class. But his ruling class is to be distinguished, not by its richness, but by its harder, more responsible work and more strict code of honour (as are the rulers postulated by Plato and members of the Communist party). Above all, Ruskin believes in production, as the ultimate test of social worth. To Ruskin, as to the Leninites, the productive worker takes his place as the man whom the State must above all honour and defend. Like them, he sees all other classes of society as ultimately, even if legitimately, parasitic upon the producers, and he draws the line between legitimate and illegitimate parasitism in very much the same place.

> [1] 'All mouths (he writes in the summer of 1871) are very properly open now against the Paris Communists because they fight that they may get wages for marching about with flags. What do the upper classes fight for, then? What have they fought for since the world

[1] *Fors*, Letter 6.

became upper and lower, but that they also might have wages for walking about with flags?'

He is never tired of comparing the robber barons and titled and bannered thieves of the Middle Ages with the capitalists of his own day, and the comparison is always very much in favour of the robber barons.

[1] 'Theft in its simplicity – however sharp and rude, yet if frankly done and bravely – does not corrupt men's souls; and they can, in a foolish, but quite vital way, keep the feast of the Virgin Mary in the midst of it. (He has been telling such a tale out of Froissart.) But Occult Theft – Theft which hides itself even from itself, and is legal, respectable, and cowardly – corrupts the body and soul of man, to the last fibre of them. And the guilty Thieves of Europe, the real sources of all deadly war in it, are the Capitalists – that is to say, people who live by percentages on the labour of others; instead of on fair wages for their own.

'The *Real* war in Europe, of which this fighting in Paris is the Inauguration, is between these and the workman, such as these have made him. They have kept him poor, ignorant, and sinful that they might, without his knowledge, gather for themselves the produce of his toil.'

Ruskin is horrified because England is making herself rich by the manufacture of armaments. These, in her strict neutrality, she is ready to sell either to France or to Prussia.

[2] 'There is no physical crime at this day, so far beyond pardon – so without parallel in its untempered guilt, as the making of war-machinery and the invention of mischievous substance. Two nations may go mad, and fight like harlots – God have mercy on them – you,

[1] *Fors*, Letter 7. [2] *Ibid.*

who hand them carving knives off the table, for leave to pick up a dropped sixpence, what mercy is there for you?'

Then when the war is over, Prussia, who has posed all through it as a pattern of the virtues, will make France pay her an indemnity of five milliard francs. The new middle class republic that hates both kings and people, and is now rid of the twenty, or perhaps thirty, thousand communards who are dead, will have to turn to and find the money.

And how will their M. Thiers raise it? By establishing a debt, of course – nothing easier. 'Everybody in France who has got any money is eager to lend it to M. Thiers at five per cent.' Who is to pay the five per cent.? That is to be raised by taxes, to be sure. And who will pay the taxes? The lenders will have to pay about one per cent. of them, and as for the other four, that will be paid by the people who had no money to lend. The workers in France have been indulging themselves by buying machine-guns and gunpowder, and now it is only right that they should pay for the use of these valuable things.

[1] 'So there is great acclaim and a triumphal procession of financiers! and the arrangement is made; namely, that all the poor labouring persons in France are to pay the rich idle ones five per cent. annually on the sum of eighty million pounds sterling until further notice. But this is not all, observe. The (workman in France) is not altogether so soft in his rind that you can crush him without some sufficient machinery: you must have your army in good order, to 'justify public confidence,' and you must get the expenses of that, beside your five per cent. out of him . . . he must pay the cost of his own roller.

'Now, therefore, see briefly what it all comes to. First,

[1] *Fors*, Letter 8.

you spend eighty millions of money in fireworks, doing no end of damage letting them off.
'Then you borrow money to pay the firework-maker's bill from any gain-loving persons who have got it.
'And then, dressing your bailiff's men in new red coats and cocked hats, you send them drumming and trumpeting into the fields, to take the peasants by the throat, and make them pay the interest on what you have borrowed; and the expense of the cocked hats beside.'

The financial case against war has seldom been more amusingly stated. Ruskin's conviction about national debts played a considerable part in his political ideas. He returned to it five years later.

[1] 'A national debt, like any other, may be honestly incurred in case of need . . . but . . . National debts paying interest are simply the purchase, by the rich, of power to tax the poor.'

Ruskin is at his best in some of his many analyses of the statements of the minor classical economists of the day. Professor Fawcett's *Manual of Political Economy* was in vogue in the early 'seventies, and Ruskin often alludes to it under the name of 'the Cambridge catechism.' In it Fawcett restates the classic proposition, that the interest paid by industry to the capitalist was due to him on three counts. Interest on capital is

First: Reward for Abstinences.
Second: Compensation for the risk of loss.
Third: Wages for the labour of superintendence.

Ruskin has a witty analysis of this, and once more he uses facts from his own income in illustration. He is worried, he

[1] *Fors*, Letter 58.

says, because he cannot make this classic analysis square with his private affairs.

> [1] 'I have, for instance, at this moment £15,000 of Bank Stock and receive £1,200 odd, a year, from the Bank, but I have never received the slightest intimation from the directors that they wished for my assistance in the superintendence of that establishment. . . .
> 'And so far from receiving my dividend as compensation for risk, I put my money into the bank because I thought it exactly the safest place to put it in. But nobody can be more anxious than I to find it proper that I should have £1,200 a year. . . . Finding two of Mr. Fawcett's reasons fail me utterly, I cling with tenacity to the third and hope the best from it.
> 'The third, or first – and now too sorrowfully the last – of the Professor's reasons, is this, that my £1,200 are given me as "The reward for abstinences." It strikes me upon this that if I had not my £15,000 of Bank Stock I should be a good deal more abstinent than I am, and that nobody would then talk of rewarding me for it. It might indeed be impossible to find even cases of very prolonged and painful abstinences, for which no reward has yet been adjudged by less abstinent England.'

If, then, he goes on, interest is not payment for labour, nor reward for abstinence, nor compensation for risk, what is it? It is Ruskin's custom to answer his own questions. Interest, he says, is either usury or taxation, and therefore the receiving of interest by private persons is stealing.

There used to be a proverb, Ruskin goes on, to the effect that you cannot have your cake and eat it too. This is true. Moreover, if you do not eat your cake it is just that you should have it. But there is no law of nature, either about

[1] *Fors*, Letter 18.

cakes, or about money, that says you must have more than you saved, whatever Mr. Fawcett may say.

> 'Not a cake and a quarter to-morrow, dunce, however abstinent you are – only the cake you have – if the mice don't get at it in the night.'

§ 3

So far Ruskin has upheld his claim to be a Communist, or at least, has said nothing which might not be said by an orthodox Communist to-day. Indeed, if we except Ruskin's hatred of machinery, and the Russians' love of it, Ruskin's belief that you can work your old aristocracy into your new system, and the Russians' belief that this is impossible, the likenesses between Ruskin's ideas and those of Russia to-day is remarkable. Dean Inge has hailed him with some justice as a Platonist. Shaw declared that when we looked for a party to-day 'which could logically claim Ruskin as one of its prophets, we find it in the Bolshivic party,' and seems to have come nearer to the truth. (Russia in 1928 is, it is to be remembered, putting into practice not war Communism, but Lenin's New Economic Policy – N. E. P.)

> [1] 'Ruskin,' says Shaw again, 'understood that the reconstruction of Society must be the work of an energetic and conscientious minority.'

According to Ruskin, private property is to be small and public property large, and the rulers are to be the poorest. Under Leninism, communal benefits often take the place of a rise in wages, while members of the Communist party (the real rulers of Russia) may not make more than five pounds a week.

[1] Pamphlet, *Ruskin's Politics*, by Bernard Shaw.

According to Ruskin, as according to Russian popular morality, speculation, the manipulation of the needs of the producers for private profit, is the worst of crimes. In Ruskin's Perfect State the merchant who makes a 'corner' will be tarred and feathered under an ordinance of Richard Cœur de Lion, while the neck of a banker who has gone bankrupt would not, under Ruskin's rule, be worth an hour's purchase. In the popular morality of the Russian cinema the villain of the piece is condemned much less because he attempts the virtue of the heroine, than because he speculates in grain. In Ruskin's State, as in Russia, there are to be no trade secrets: in both production is to be of necessities first, and luxuries afterwards, while desirable artistic or natural products, which cannot be multiplied, are to be either for communal use, or for the children, the sick, and the old – and never for the powerful.

§ 4

Yet with all this – and the points of resemblance might be multiplied – there is of course no one whom the Communist more dislikes or despises than the man of Ruskin's type; while Ruskin, as we have seen, never made any attempt to help, or even to applaud, the practical Communists of his own day, oppressed people who would, he must have supposed, have been glad enough of his pen and influence.

It was not, it seems pretty clear, that, through some old trick of fate, Ruskin had never heard of Marx, or had a chance of reading about Communism except in the *Daily Telegraph* (his usual morning paper). He alludes, for instance, in *Fors* to the First International's conference at The Hague. Besides this, Ruskin was, as we have said, in touch with Mazzini, who was in turn in touch with Marx and Engels, and who had indeed attended those first historic meetings at St. Martin's Hall. Besides this, Ruskin was a

man permanently in the public eye, and his writings ever since *Stones of Venice* had been red enough in patches to make it certain that some proselytizing Communist must have approached him and sent him literature. He got into close relations, for instance, with several groups of Owenite Communists whom he helped at Sheffield, and it is too much to believe that a very slight gesture could not have got him into touch with the men who were fighting for the working class either in England or in Paris. Paris, where he so often found himself, had of course, as the strange and tragic adventure of the Commune showed, a large population of Communist theorists, while Marx's celebrated pamphlet *The Civil War in France* was published by him (in English) on May 30, 1871, the day after the Commune fell.

The fact is that the differences between Ruskin and the Communists of his day or ours, are much more vital than the identity of their economic morality. A Communist would probably sum the difference succinctly, if unkindly, by applying to Ruskin the proverb, 'The cat likes fish, but will not wet her feet.'

A Communist might perhaps be willing to launch into conditional prophecy concerning Ruskin. If he did, his proposition might take some such form as this. Had a revolution taken place in London in 1871, as it did in Paris, and had the revolutionaries been of exactly Ruskin's way of thinking, Ruskin would never have lifted a finger to help them to establish the New State. He could never have recognized his own principles if there had been any danger of their being put into practice. If a new body of Chartists had stood in Hyde Park and quoted his own words, if they had embroidered them on their banners, Ruskin would have yet denounced them.

Nor, our imaginary Marxian would probably go on, must we allow ourselves to suppose that it was violence to which Ruskin objected. A bloodless overthrow of the State which

he denounced would have been opposed by him. Ruskin had never taken the pacificist point of view. He was always, like Carlyle, ready to approve of 'necessary sternness' and of a war for what he felt to be a worthy, or even honourable, end. Did he not help to lead the support of Governor Eyre, did he not greatly admire Frederick the Great, and is not Richard Cœur de Lion one of the heroes of *Fors*?

A necessarily ineffective Guild of St. George in aid of his political convictions? Yes. The risks and agonies of a war? In certain circumstances, yes. But the risks and agonies of a revolution? No.

In judging of the justness of such a prediction we must (our Marxian would go on) consider how blind Ruskin was to what was going on in Paris. It apparently never occurred to him that the Commune should not be judged by responsible people and leaders of opinion only through the testimony of its enemies. Ruskin swallowed – with sorrow – all the stories of Red atrocities with which Thiers justified his severities. He never even did the simple piece of arithmetic which would have led him to the surprising conclusion that the respectable M. Thiers had shed more blood than Robespierre.

Briefly, then, a Communist would hold that though his theory was thoroughly subversive of capitalist theory, Ruskin could only write in favour of Communist principles, while those principles were a long way from being effective. Ruskin believed, as has been shown by quotation, that Rent, Interest and Profit are robbery, and that the interests of classes were in fact contradictory in the England in which he lived. But unlike Marx, he saw this second proposition as a temporary, and evitable, local fact, not as one example of a general fact. He did not believe the Marxian deduction, that is, that the interests of rich and poor are fundamentally and invariably opposed, and that the only hope of social justice lies in the establishment of a class-less society.

Ruskin's conjectural inability to take what a Communist would see as the obvious next step, and try to upset capitalism, would probably be attributed by our imaginary Marxian to Ruskin's tender-heartedness and sincerity. He really cared for, and felt for, the workers, and yet was irrevocably himself, by birth and upbringing, in body and spirit, a member of the spending and privileged class. At every evidence of the necessity of the class war, the Communist would say, Ruskin would be seen as bound to leave his intellectual position, and to come back to his much more fundamental class alignment. But as he was tender-hearted, sensitive, just, and benevolent, he was unwilling, and thus unable, to believe in a general clash of interest between his class and that of the workers, or to see such events as those in France in his character of Communist. He saw them inevitably as an English gentleman.

However, speculation about what Ruskin would have done had there been a revolution in England is, after all, idle. For there is nothing truer in the Communist creed, than their doctrine that revolutionaries do not make revolutions.

There was really little in the England of 1871 to encourage the idea that a revolution was within sight.

Such a State as that which Ruskin advocated and Lenin established cannot be set up until the cup of the iniquity of the old State runs over. While the governing classes are still able and willing to govern, there will be no revolution. In Ruskin's day the governing classes were markedly efficient, even if, as Ruskin held, they were not particularly attractive. There was none of that lassitude, slackness, and doubt, none of that lovely phosphorescence of decay, that made the governing classes of France and of Russia so romantic when the years 1789 and 1917 brought them down.

True, Ruskin, in *Fors*, is always able, like Matthew Arnold, to quote atrocities from the newspapers – families are dying

in the damp and darkness of Glasgow cellars, girls are selling themselves for a meal, mothers are starving with their babies at their breasts, little boys are imprisoned and flogged because no one has taken the trouble to teach them, iron-masters are beating down wages below the subsistence level. *Fors* is full of such recitals. Ruskin thinks that this is the stuff of which revolutions are made, and he threatens the hard plutocracy of England with the wrath of the poor if they do not turn from their money-making and pride, and look upon the sad face of their country.

But as a study of history proves, this is not at all the sort of situation which leads to a violent revision of the economic basis of society. As long as Ruskin's 'spending classes' have the vigour to rake money together, as long as they believe in themselves, so long will the patient producers (with little time or energy left for reflection) shrug their shoulders and believe what they read in the newspapers. They will still suppose that it was drink, or lewdness, or improvidence, that brought those families, those girls, those mothers, those little boys, those iron-workers, to a fate which they themselves, the mass of the working class, have on the whole managed to escape. It is only when disaster comes very near the nation as a whole, when the lower middle class is trembling, when the spenders have ceased to be able to make out a plausible case for themselves, when they send the soldiers unarmed to their wars, and when the machinery of the State runs down of itself, that the working class will sometimes undertake a sudden reversal of old values.

Then, if sufficiently self-sacrificing and active leaders arise, the forces of tragedy and revolution may be harnessed to the setting up of such a State as that which Ruskin desired to see.

But to the England of 1871, revolutionary leaders would have been of no use. England was recovering from a recent slump and was making money again, while France and

Prussia were out of the way busy with their wars. So, while trade boomed again, Ruskin foretold revolution, but Marx and Engels set themselves to the task of analysing the origins of what they saw about them. Desiring the things that Ruskin desired, they did not content themselves, as Ruskin did, with saying on a great scale what (the reader may remember) the Evangelical supporters of our rule in Jamaica had said on a small: namely, that the poverty and general unsatisfactoriness of the country was due to the depravity of human nature.

§ 5

But we must not allow too much disparagement of such a political writer as Ruskin. Our imaginary Communist would be the first to grant that nothing practical could be done at the date when Ruskin was writing *Fors*, to substantiate in England the ideas which he advocated there.

The most rigid must admit that a change of method being impossible, such men as Ruskin, Carlyle, Dickens and Matthew Arnold did a good deal to soften the rigidity with which the capitalist system was applied, while Ruskin also helped very materially to awaken the working class, and to shake upper class belief in 'the great picnic party.' As Shaw has said – Ruskin, with his extraordinary eloquence and force of style, did awaken a great many people to those ideas which he, and all Socialists, Marxians, and Utopians, hold in common. His real work was this awakening. He told the workers that it was not drink that kept them down, nor the natural inferiority attributed to them by Mr. Lowe, nor the inscrutable laws of God. He told the productive worker that he was poor because his pocket was being picked as fast as he could fill it. Ruskin, like Marx, knew one great truth, 'the simple fact, hitherto hidden under ideological overgrowths, that above all things men must eat, drink,

dress, and find shelter, before they can give themselves to politics, science, art, religion, or anything else.' [1]

If we are to compare Ruskin and Marx to one another, we may perhaps see Ruskin as a devoted missionary, very sure of his vocation and giving out quinine to a malaria-stricken population: we may see Marx as Sir Ronald Ross, engaged in the less sympathetic and often apparently irrelevant work of dissecting mosquitoes.

§ 6

However, Marxians are not the only possessors to-day of a formula in whose light it may be worth while to examine any facts about Ruskin's career or opinions which may have seemed perverse and puzzling. The psycho-analyst may probably be ready to give us yet another explanation of Ruskin's failure to join hands with the Marxians of his day. That offered by 'Deep psychology' may prove an explanation which we had better not neglect either, for there is, after all, a good deal to explain, as all his contemporaries felt. It was not only with the Marxians that Ruskin failed to join forces. We shall find him complaining of his isolation, and his loneliness, while there were plenty of people about him – only a little outside his ordinary circle of acquaintance – who not only willed his ends, but, like Dixon the cork-cutter, also willed his lack of means. He was a lonely geologist, a lonely botanist, and a lonely art critic, as well as being a lonely economist.

The psychologists' explanation of this tormenting sense of isolation would probably be that loneliness is characteristic of Ruskin's type of nervous sensitiveness and melancholy, and is roughly analogous to the sense of persecution, which is such a common feature of madness.

Ruskin's inability to work with the Marxians was no

[1] Engels at Marx's grave-side.

different, the psycho-analyst would hold, from his inability to work with anyone else. Ruskin set himself, not against one, but against *all* the currents of his time. There is a deal of railway enterprise: Ruskin will be against railway enterprise. There is a movement on foot for an extension of the franchise: Ruskin will oppose it. Women's rights are being advocated: he will be against them. Professor Tyndal has such-and-such views about the movements of glaciers: he will hold quite contrary views. Most geologists of his day have one system of classification of minerals: he will have another. And so on through almost the whole long list of his activities.

After all, strict as his upbringing had been, it had been nothing if not admiring.

He was, as his friend Norton said of him,

> [1] 'the only child of a domineering woman . . . tenderly loved by her, and petted, ruled, disciplined, and spoiled by her, and loved and petted by his father . . . his moral sense early and morbidly over-developed . . . his self-will and his vanity encouraged as he grew up by the devotion of father, mother, and friends. . . . For years after most men are forced to match themselves with the real world, he was living in a world of his own.'

Such an upbringing leaves its mark.

It was scarcely lonely Ruskin's fault if the Narcissistic contemplation of his own perfections, which he had been taught, made him to a great extent incapable of seeing other people's work or hearing other people's views.

He had been flattered and curbed all his life. We have come to the period when we must see the sins of the fathers visited on the children, and all Ruskin's pleasant vices, knotted into whips to scourge him.

[1] *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton.*

One last task remains, however, before we go on with his story: this is to state as briefly as possible what Ruskin meant by the Guild of St. George.

The Guild of St. George was to be a voluntary association of people who would club together a tenth of their incomes, not in order to emigrate, or to found a colony, but to try, as far as they could, to make their own country worth staying in. They were to help to reclaim some of the waste ground of England, and to manage any already cultivated land that came under them, on a particular system. It was to be ploughed and sown by people who meant to live on it, and by it, and as far as possible they were to live and work without the aid of steam.

A number of agricultural groups were thus to be formed which should live in communication with one another. One of the uses of the St. George's Fund (after its necessary use in buying and stocking such new land as the growing Guild might be able to undertake) was to be the buying of good books, prints, and other objects of interest and beauty. These were not to be owned by individuals, but were for the schools and museums which were to be set up. It was hoped that existing country landowners would come into the scheme, and administer their estates on the lines laid down. Class distinctions were to be maintained, and emphasis is laid upon discipline and obedience. Other points were that the strictest commercial rectitude was to be enforced: the measure of value was to be so much corn, or meat, or wine of the best quality. The rich were to live more simply and the poor better than in the rest of the country. Above all, in the Guild's dealings, the principle of the living wage was to be acknowledged, and the current morality of buying cheap and selling dear, disregarded.

If a country landowner joined the Guild, then besides paying his tithe to St. George's Fund, he was, as has been suggested, to administer his estate in accordance with Guild

principles. Suppose a factory hand joined it – some Sheffield steel-workers did later on – then the Guild would do its best to settle him on the land and at agricultural work if he showed any aptitude for it.

The Master of the Guild was to be an elected autocrat with officers called Marshals under him. The accounts were to be carefully and publicly kept, and *Fors Clavigera* was to be St. George's official organ.

One of the earlier of Ruskin's many statements about the Guild lands will give the reader the best idea of the spirit in which he approached the settlement side of the scheme. This is how he wrote of it in the May of 1871 in the fifth letter of *Fors*:

> 'We will try to make some small piece of English ground, beautiful, peaceful, and fruitful. We will have no steam-engines upon it, and no railroads: we will have no untended or unthought-of creatures on it; none wretched but the sick; none idle but the dead. We will have no liberty upon it; but instant obedience to known law, and appointed persons; no equality upon it; but recognition of every betterness that we can find, and reprobation of every worseness. . . . When we want to carry anything anywhere, we will carry it either on the backs of beasts, or on our own, or in carts, or boats; we will have plenty of flowers and vegetables in our gardens, plenty of corn and grass in our fields – and few bricks. We will have some music and poetry; the children shall learn to dance to it and sing it; perhaps some of the old people, in time, may also.'

The workers of England had, as a whole, almost forgotten how to dance and sing.

It is only fair to Ruskin to bear constantly in mind that almost all the manufacturing towns of England; almost all

the dispossessed town workers; and all the pretentious bourgeoisie that inhabited them, had grown up in Ruskin's memory. We are all ready now to admit that Garden Cities would have been far more efficient than the unplanned wildernesses of bricks and mortar that Ruskin's age has bequeathed to us. But this was not then popularly acknowledged.

We are also to remember that when Ruskin began *Fors*, there was scarcely any amelioration of the unhealthiness for body and mind of this raw town life. The Public Health Act, for instance, and the first Artisans' Dwelling Act, which acknowledged some general responsibility for the new town populations, were not passed till 1875.

Such an impartial witness as Mr. George Trevelyan speaks for the fact that what Ruskin experienced was not merely a common, if well founded, longing for the days when he was young, but a set of real and sudden evils, and such a change in the aspect of society as had never been seen before in one generation. If Ruskin had been listened to on this one subject it would have saved the country much cash and trouble to-day.

By 1875, writes Mr. Trevelyan, bad building and bad town-planning had got such a start that they have never been properly overtaken even in a material and practical way.

> 'Much less could anything be done to set a limit to the ever advancing bounds of the realm of ugliness and uniformity in its constant destruction of the beauty and variety of the old pre-industrial world. . . . The nineteenth century did not attack beauty, it simply trampled it under foot.'

Ruskin had consistently, all his life, been on the side of health and good civics. The Utopian and impossible St. George's Guild was his final effort.

He took great pleasure, now whimsically and now in

earnest, in following up for St. George, the ideas that he had read in Plato or in Sir Thomas More. Now he would elaborate sumptuary laws, now he would think out fresh and often extremely sensible methods of education (since in general use), or again he would busy himself and spend his substance in founding the Guild's first museum at Sheffield.

The Guild has only finally died since the war, and to this day a certain amount of Guild property remains in existence. It rather embarrasses the remaining trustees, who often wonder what Mr. Ruskin would have wished should be done with it.

CHAPTER XXX

1872–1874: Aged 53–55

THE NARRATIVE RESUMED

§ 1

An odd thought came to Ruskin as soon as his mother was dead.

There had been complaints in the newspapers about the dirtiness of the streets. Somehow the idea of tidiness and cleanliness stood in part for Ruskin's idea of his mother. For instance, he had never forgotten cleaning down the stone steps of an inn for her, and he tried to establish a fountain as her chief memorial. Now it occurred to him to try to keep a bit of the London streets clean. The first interest on the St. George's Guild Fund came in that January, and the first workers employed with St. George's money were three men with brooms, who were to 'exhibit' (within an area of about a quarter of a mile near St. Giles's) 'a constantly clean roadway and pavement.'

The thing was done for a while, as long, in fact, as Ruskin stayed to superintend it. But he was not there for long, for he had decided to sell the Denmark Hill house.

Characteristically, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Severn had been settled by the Ruskins in the old house at Herne Hill where Ruskin had been brought up. Here the Severns reserved a room for him, and that room was, inevitably, Ruskin's old nursery. After this period, therefore, whenever

he was in London, it was to his oldest memories that he returned. For the rest he moved all his possessions – Turners, Titians, Raeburns, Northcotes, solid plate, sound mahogany, Turkey carpets, and tea-urns – out of London, and took them either to his rooms in Corpus at Oxford, or else to Brantwood.

He left Denmark Hill in March, 1872, very sad at this symbol of the disruption of the old family life. But he was fortunately very popular at Oxford that term, and the work helped him through the transition. He had to give ten lectures, and so great was the wish to hear him that, as became usual, each of the ten lectures had to be repeated to a general audience. These were the lectures which were afterwards reprinted under the title of *The Eagle's Nest* – nobody quite knew why.

§ 2

Can it be that the reader has already guessed that after the fatigues of this set of lectures Ruskin decided upon the relaxation of a Tour? We can trace him by the letters that make up *Fors*. They are dated from Pisa, Verona, Rome, or Venice. In his diary he notes that his life seems to fly like a dream, and as dust in the wind. He thought as usual a great deal about Rose, who was still uncertain. But he was now once more a little hopeful, for Margaret Ruskin's death had drawn them together, and she had been kind to him in his trouble. When he came back to England again, in August, Rose was again gentle to him, and Ruskin was happy. He went to Broadlands to the Mount Temples. There he met some people called Leycester, and he and Rose stayed together in the Leycesters' house in Cheshire.

Ruskin sits by Rose in church. But things do not go too well: she has been tormented by her uncertainty just as he has. She is restless; her mother would think ill of her per-

haps if she knew she had been nice to him, and after all that would not be so unreasonable. The tone of *Fors* lately has not been such as to conciliate her: Ruskin is always abusing bishops. Has he no more to say on religion and on the ministers of God? Finally, at the end of August, or early in September, she again tells him that she will not have him.

§ 3

There was nothing to be done. But it was in a very miserable mood that Ruskin took possession of Brantwood a week or two later. He wondered if Rose would ever sit in his chairs or walk his garden paths. He threw himself into his work and at last managed to settle down to writing his autumn lectures for Oxford.

He stayed at Brantwood for some time, only, in fact, leaving it in the next eighteen months to lecture on miracles at the Grosvenor Hotel, to give his Oxford lectures, and to repeat some of them at Eton and elsewhere. It was during this time (1873) that Ruskin gave the lecture on birds that he afterwards collected into a book, to which he gave the title, *Love's Meinie* ('Many,' Court, or Entourage).

All the while he wrote *Fors* every month – he wrote about Sir Walter Scott, or about currency in the Channel Islands, or about Italian pictures, just as the fancy took him – and all the while he was pushing forward the preliminaries of the St. George's Guild, in rather a depressed spirit: so far (end of 1873) the total amount that has been added to his own subscription of seven thousand, is £236 13*s*.

He has now been publishing *Fors* for three years, and such a result seems mean and wretched.

§ 4

In another of his conflicts with the world he was, however, more successful, and after so many dismal chronicles,

the history of his adventure in the book trade is cheerful. 'Mr. Ruskin,' announced the book trade circular, 'has transferred his publishing to the middle of a country field.' It was true. All Ruskin's books and pamphlets had followed *Fors*, and were now, like it, published at Orpington. Ruskin had finally left Messrs. Smith & Elder, though not without regret for Mr. Smith and his walnuts and old port, and henceforth all his publishing was to be done by Mr. George Allen.

The publishing and bookselling trades were worked in the 'seventies – (as is much of the newspaper selling trade to-day) – on an almost uncheckable and often slightly corrupt system of discounts, allowances, thirteens to the dozen, middlemen two and three deep, high prices, and indefinite credits. In this system the whole industry was enmeshed, and all suffered from it – booksellers, publishers, and, not least, authors. Ruskin, disliking the whole wire entanglement, demanded that the trade should at any rate sell his books, as is the custom to-day, at net prices. There was an outcry against this suggestion: the idea was said to be ridiculous and impossible. Ruskin countered by cutting out the whole trade and all its middlemen, and selling all his books, as he sold *Fors*, from Orpington through the sole agency of his old pupil, George Allen. And here, as we shall see, Ruskin for once triumphed in a practical enterprise: time proved him first right, and afterwards (from the most strictly commercial point of view) successful. He made more money out of his books than he had ever made before, while to-day the trade has conceded many of his points.

§ 5

But this was almost the only thing that went right. His Oxford lectures were rather poor – not those on birds, which he and most people liked – but another set on Tuscan art in the thirteenth century (November, 1873). Lectures of

Ruskin's were for once thinly attended, and in his own opinion people were right to stay away.

So from Oxford he betook himself to Herne Hill for a week or two, and took to going to the pantomimes with various of his child friends. He writes about them in *Fors* – finding morals in them, which we hope he spared the children.

The loss of his mother and of old Anne, his nurse, made him feel lonely that first Christmas at Brantwood, but the loss of Rose was harder still to bear. He would stand on the grey shingle by the lake, with his broad hat pulled down against the wind, and wonder if Rose would ever stand with him to look across the water at the snow on Coniston Old Man, or ever turn with him, back to the bright fires of Brantwood.

Going from Coniston to Oxford in 1874, to give his Lent Term lectures, Ruskin felt, after all, too ill and wretched to stand up to his audiences. Though he had chosen a geological subject (the science to which he commonly flew in times of trouble), he cancelled the course. Rose was ill again, and averted herself from him. She would not see him, and either could not, or would not, write. He was fretted and miserable, unable to settle to anything. But he worked with his pupils in the drawing schools, and it was in this term of the cancelled lectures that he put what seemed to his contemporaries one of his oddest whims into practice.

A village near Oxford named Ferry Hinksey lies deep among the water meadows, and at that time was only to be got at by a track. This track was cut into deep ruts by the carts, which sometimes got stuck. It occurred to Ruskin, who often walked that way, that the road ought to be put in order. He had also long been convinced that manual labour was good for everybody, and especially for scholars. This spring he determined to put the two ideas together. If Mr. Harcourt, the owner, would allow, he would get together a band of undergraduates, who should come out with picks, spades, and barrows. The worst bit of the old cart track,

where the water lodged, should be taken up, and throughout the whole way the ruts should be filled in, and the banks should be sown with wild-flowers. The first 'diggers' breakfast' was given by Ruskin to some Balliol men on March 24, 1874. He got his workers started, and then – Ruskin-like – was once more off for a six-months' Tour.

§ 6

But he was genuinely ill. He took no friends with him, only a courier and his servant, Crawley. In such a state of depression did he find himself in Paris, that he saw a doctor there – an unusual proceeding for Ruskin.

However, there was some congenial work to be done if he could get as far as Italy, for he was a member of the Council of the Arundel Society and was to superintend the copying of some Giotto Frescoes at Assisi. Also this time the route was to be a little varied, for after Assisi he was to go and visit a family of friends in Sicily.

At Assisi, however, he grew worse. While he was ill here, as at Matlock, he had strange dreams and fancies. He dreamed repeatedly and with much detail that he had been made a brother of the third degree of St. Francis. When he got better the idea had taken a strong hold of his imagination. He turned it over and over in his mind.

Love? Renunciation? How hard it is for a rich man . . .? Could it be that what was wrong with his life, was that his father had left him a rich man? Suppose he behaved as if the dream were true, suppose he renounced everything, gave up Rose, gave up believing that he was a teacher of men? Under the rule of St. Francis only simplicity and obedience would be expected of him. His responsibilities would be gone at a stroke, a tinkling bell would ring him in, give him his times and seasons. . . .

But the thought of the tinkling bell brought other

thoughts to his mind. For, after all, he would be expected to believe in more than in love and in poverty. There was the Mass, a body of doctrine. . . . That was impossible: it would have been as easy, as he once said, for him to be a fire-worshipper as to be a Catholic. Then what about the renunciation by itself, without the embracing of any Rule?

And so the idea got whittled away, and he went off to Naples with his valet and his courier.

Naples he found – as on his former visit – detestable beyond words. 'The most loathsome nest of human caterpillars I was ever forced to stay in.'

But Sicily was wonderful, affording Ruskin his first and only sight of Greek and Moorish architecture. He sketched and wrote, was extremely active, and saw a moral in everything. However, he was not there long, but was soon back on the familiar ground again. First he went to Rome, and when Rome grew hot in July, he went back to the hills at Assisi. The vision had gone, but the Giottos and two kind monks remained.

Here he used to write in the sacristan's cell of the church of St. Francis, and argue with Fra Giovanni or Fra Antonio, who adored him and waited upon him and made him free of what Ruskin had once called the 'holy pantry,' where the relics were kept, and the vessels washed up after Mass.

It is easy, if we let Ruskin speak for himself too much, and judge his life as he tells it us querulously or indignantly in *Fors*, to forget how attractive he was to almost everybody he met (except Jowett and Matthew Arnold), and how such quiet people as friars, and his servants, and the sacristans of cathedrals, adored him, and admired his endless courtesy and his generosity. He would write letters from England to his favourite sacristans, and argue with them as equals; and best perhaps of all, for the monks, Protestant as they thought him, he would always give the courtesy of his knee to the passing Host.

He used to drink coffee every morning with the two Franciscan brothers, Giovanni and Antonio, breaking off from his studies of Giotto.

Fra Antonio passionately wants Ruskin to believe, so at last Ruskin challenges him to raise one of the dead friars out of the cemetery . . . 'on which, for the sake of the end of it, Fra Antonio recounts Dives and Lazarus very grandly.'

§ 7

Something; either his own visions, or Fra Antonio's eloquence, Giotto's pictures, or the thought of Rose, at this time undoubtedly turned Ruskin more towards religion than he had been this long while, and especially to the aspect of Christianity which enjoins love. Yet as a prophet he was still denunciatory and witty. He wrote in *Fors* for that August,[1] not to the workmen this time, but to the squires of England, urging upon them that they must love their land and seek to leave it better and more beautiful, and think of their tenantry as people who can be tended and helped and encouraged. Then he launched out into an imaginary scene. He has been studying Michelangelo in Rome. How would it have been, he writes, if Sir Joshua Reynolds, who painted the British Squire as he has never been painted before or since, had followed Michelangelo's example and had used all his force and wit to paint a 'Last Judgment upon Squires,' and had laid the scene of it in Leicestershire? In Ruskin's scene squire and dame speak up for themselves, as they had in life.

> 'Behold, Lord, there is thy land: which I have (as far as my distressed circumstances would permit) laid up in a napkin. Perhaps there may be a cottage or so less upon it than when I came into the estate – a tree cut down here and there imprudently – but the grouse and foxes are undiminished. Behold Thou has that is Thine.'

[1] *Fors*, Letter 45.

CHAPTER XXXI

1874–1875: Aged 55–56

ROSE

'Artemidora! Gods invisible,
While thou art lying faint along the couch,
Have tied the sandal to thy veinèd feet,
And stand beside thee, ready to convey
Thy weary steps where other rivers flow.'

—LANDOR.

§ 1

WHEN Ruskin came back to England to give his autumn lectures in 1874, it was to receive 'the loveliest letters from Rosie.' She came to London with her family, and they met sometimes at Mr. George Macdonald's house. 'She has come back to me,' Ruskin wrote, 'finding she can't get on without some of the love she used to have.' It was at this time that she allowed Ruskin to make a pencil drawing of her.[1] For a week or two Ruskin began to hope again, scarcely noticing, or unwilling to see, how ill she was.

She looks less than her age of twenty-two in the slight profile he drew of her. The thin wreath of flowers was laid upon smooth loops of very fair hair, and the eyes were between blue and grey. She was a most beautiful creature, tall and graceful. Once when she was a child and galloped about on her pony, her eyes had been full of play: now they were sad enough. Most people found that there was something impressive about Rose when she was grown up. One stranger, on seeing her for the first time, said that she looked 'like a young sister of Christ's.' But Ruskin's portrait and the word of other acquaintance seem to give a certain sense of coldness and reserve.

[1] See plate facing this page.

ROSE LA TOUCHE, 1874

From a drawing by John Ruskin, reproduced by permission of Messrs. George Allen and Unwin

Dr. Greville Macdonald, who remembers her well, told the writer that Rose's beauty was most remarkable, and that she was curiously witty and trenchant in her way of speaking.

But she could not deal with the miserable situation in which she found herself. She was overborne by the struggles of the older, stronger people about her. Ruskin's biographers, and those who knew her, seem agreed that she cared sincerely for Ruskin, but was perhaps a little surprised that he should love her so much. She would almost certainly, however, have been willing to marry him.

But her mother was a woman of vigorous and narrow character, and much power of expression, the leader of the circle of friends with whom the La Touches mixed. It was almost inevitable that Rose should not finally be able to bring herself to go against her. Yet poor Rose saw plainly enough what Ruskin suffered. The conflict and pain of such a situation were too much for her, and between them, her life was pulled to pieces.

She did not seem to be suffering from any disease, but she grew very thin, and 'a decline' was spoken of. She would eat nothing. Presently allusions to our old friend, 'brain fever,' begin to occur, and on October 19 we find Ruskin is writing ominous words to his old friend Dr. Brown. 'By peace and time,' he writes, 'her state might be redeemable.'

The tone of the next *Fors* letter reflects Ruskin's state of mind at this new horror, in a way that must have made his friends uncomfortable. 'One of my best friends has just gone mad, and all the rest say I am mad myself.' He is not surprised, nor sorry, he writes, that so few people should be willing to trust him with their money for St. George's Fund. He has finally begun not to care what happens outside his study.

[1] 'I understand this state of even temper to be what most people call rational; and indeed it has been the

[1] *Fors*, Letter 48.

result of very steady effort on my own part to keep myself, if it might be, out of Hanwell or that other Hospital which makes the name of Christ's native village dreadful in the ears of London.'

As other people have not been willing to trust him with their money, he has made some experiments of his own, he says, and goes on to give the readers of *Fors* a mercilessly truthful account of various of his odder, and less successful, enterprises, such as the sweeping of the streets, certain hay-making at Brantwood, and so on.

Correspondents had not been wanting to tell him he was mad, and here he was juggling about with Hanwell and Bedlam (there is more to the same effect) in a way to make his admirers uneasy: indeed, the whole business makes uncomfortable reading. For with all the pain, there is an element of the grotesque in this story.

There is a theatrical saying that one corpse makes a tragedy and two corpses a farce. The analogy seems to hold good here: and with Rose La Touche driven mad by her parents and Ruskin by his, a truthful chronicle seems to rock perilously near absurdity, and biography to be in danger of becoming a treatise on the relations of parents and children. However, the story is true, and human beings in general are nothing if not grotesque.

§ 2

We are to imagine poor Ruskin, then, holding on to his reason at Oxford during that term (autumn, 1874). He tried to be rather matter-of-fact, he tried not to think of Rose's estranged face, or to hope for a telegram or a letter saying she had asked for him.

He managed to give rather a good course of lectures. He told his hearers about the work he had just done in studying

the earlier Masters. He talked about Giotto, Cimabue, Fra Angelico and Botticelli – names that were so new to most of them as to sound comic. (The profane used to ask one another who would be Ruskin's next 'great man.') He was often witty, calling Vasari, for instance, 'an ass with precious stones in his panniers.' He worked hard, taught at the drawing-school as well as giving lectures. Every day he would go and visit the road workers at Hinksey; and the diggers' breakfasts were resumed, with Mallock, Toynbee and Mr. Collingwood as guests.

The spade-work there was over by now, and the time for stone-breaking had come. The undergraduates were impetuous, and used, instead of the stones, to break the heads off their hammers. So Ruskin sent himself to school to learn for them, and sat many hours beside the Iffley Road with a professional stonebreaker, until he could catch the trick of it.

This affair was incidentally very much talked about. Cartoons were sold in the Broad, verses appeared in *Punch*, and to walk over to Hinksey to laugh at the diggers became a fashionable afternoon's amusement for the sporting elements of Oxford.

'In spite of sorrow,' writes Mr. Collingwood, 'with strange firmness of mind, he would meet his pupils and give his afternoons to them, he would correct their blunders and discuss their readings – not like a tutor, but rather like a fellow-student.'

It seems odd that Ruskin, whom sorrow and anxiety were apt to fret to the point of collapse, could have gone on with his ordinary outward life at this time. A good many people by now knew that a woman whom he loved was very ill – and that that was why he could not quite fix his mind on what went on in the drawing-school. Rose grew worse all through the term, and in her weakness and misery she turned completely against him.

There is a story of this period, which is, however, denied by Cook. It is to this effect. As Rose lay dying, Ruskin sent her a message begging to be allowed to come and see her. She sent back to say that she would only see him if he would say he loved God better than he loved her. Ruskin would not say this, and so the two never met again.

What at all events is certain, is that to Ruskin the strain of her last months was terrible, and that, towards the end, he tried in vain to keep up the pretences of daily life. He could not deliver his Lent course of lectures: though he went to Oxford and taught in his drawing-school, and sometimes coached his pupils. As the spring drew on she got no better; and would scarcely speak or eat. By May there seemed no hope. He knew now, as he looked out at the thickening shadows of the college limes and elms, that Rose would never see his trees or the crinkled silver of the lake at Brantwood. It seemed unbearable that she should be so young and so wretched. Her letter that he loved the best he carried always with him, between thin gold plates. Now she would never write to him again.

On May 29, 1875, she died.

§ 3

Ruskin had been up to see the Academy, of all things, and was too sad even to go and see Carlyle. He came back to Oxford to write up his notes.

> 'I had just got it done (he writes to Carlyle) with other worldliness, and was away into the meadows, to see clover and bean blossom, when the news came that the little story of my Wild Rose was ended, and the hawthorn blossoms would fall this year – over her.'

CHAPTER XXXII

1875–1878: Aged 56–59

CARPACCIO AND WHISTLER

§ 1

Two days after Rose's death some ironic power arranged that Ruskin should have to take a large party of Royalties round his drawing-school and museum.

However, he was able to go north to Brantwood a few days after. Some of his Oxford disciples, including Mr. Collingwood, were fortunately already staying in the house, finishing off a translation of Xenophon. He worked with them, and at cutting a little coppice by the lake.

§ 2

During the summer of 1875 *Fors* was largely occupied either by some good notes on how to write popular science books, or by autobiography. It had always been part of the plan of *Fors* that Ruskin should tell his readers what sort of man it was who was addressing them. Now he began to set before them, by fits and starts, a good deal of what afterwards appeared in *Præterita* – the material which has been much used and quoted in the earlier chapters of the present book.

His frankness is extraordinary. His mother had not been dead more than three years, and here in June he is writing

the bitter summary which ends Chapter III, and in August he writes of her even more specifically:

> [1] '. . . my Mother always felt in cultivated society – and was too proud to feel with patience – the defects of her own early education, and therefore (which was the true and fatal sign of such defect) never familiarly visited anyone whom she did not feel to be, in some sort, her inferior.'

This mood of reminiscence was not only expressed in *Fors*, but together with *Fors* and the affairs of the Guild, dominated his activities. He had already once driven in a carriage, and by a round-about route, from Brantwood to London.

Now he determined to systematize this way of getting about – a way which the world had almost forgotten.

So he had a special posting carriage built full of cunning drawers and luggage-racks and – to the tune of a good deal of newspaper gossip – he did more than one sketching tour in the old manner.

§ 3

The first museum of St. George had been founded at Sheffield. It comprised at first only two rooms of the cottage in which the curator lived. This curator was a man named Henry Swan, who was, like George Allen, an ex-pupil from Red Lion Square. Swan was a Quaker and a vegetarian, and soon got to know all the odd people of the district. These he used to collect for Ruskin, and they used to meet and talk. Some of them professed Communism – no doubt of the Owenite kind – and they and Ruskin used to debate St. George's Guild. They would not join the Guild because of its hierarchical structure, but Ruskin seems to have borne

[1] *Fors*, Letter 56.

them no malice, and the Guild was very good to them and bought them a farm of thirteen acres on which to found some sort of half-time colony. The Owenites had themselves chosen the land, they knew nothing about farming, the land proved to be worthless, they all had trades, and were very properly unwilling to trust themselves to thirteen acres of land. The whole thing ended in smoke and mild recriminations.

The museum and Swan himself prospered, however, and when, next year, Ruskin's Oxford lectures were over, and the new posting carriage was to be used again, Ruskin decided to take both the Severns, and to go from London to Brantwood via Sheffield.

Mr. Arthur Severn gives an amusing account of the latter part of that journey, and of how they set out from the inn at Sheffield.

> [1] 'The Professor gave orders that we were to start after luncheon, . . . there was the carriage at the door, and a still more gorgeous postilion than any we had had so far on our journey. His riding breeches were of the tightest and whitest I ever saw; his horses were an admirable pair, and looked like going. A very large crowd had assembled outside the inn, to see what extraordinary kind of mortals could be going to travel in such a way. "Well, Professor," I said, "I really don't know what the people expect – whether it is a bride and bridegroom, or what." He said, "Well, Arthur, you and Joan shall play at being bride and bridegroom inside the carriage, and I will get on the box." He got hold of Mrs. Severn by the arm and pulled her into the carriage, I was put in afterwards, and he jumped up on the box. The crowd closed in, and looked at us as if we were a sort of menagerie. I was much amused when I

[1] Quoted by Mr. Collingwood from Mr. Severn's article in *Igdrasil*.

thought how little these eager people knew that the real attraction was on the box.

'We very soon got to one of the steep hills which seem to abound here, and went up at a hard gallop. Towards the top of it one of the horses turned out to be very restless, and it was evidently a sort of jibber. The gorgeous postilion had great difficulty to control it; and at last (I hardly like to mention such things), but in his efforts to control this wild Sheffield animal, these gorgeous riding trousers went off "pop." They cracked like a sail in a gale of wind. The horse became still more restive, and at last the whole thing came to a standstill. We had to get out, and the Professor got down from the box.'

'The Professor,' goes on Mr. Severn, 'treats any little accident like that with the utmost coolness and seemed glad to look at the view.'

With the postilion's saddle on the jibber, the journey was safely continued, and the whole party arrived at Brantwood on a sunny afternoon after three weeks of delightful travelling.

§ 4

Mention has been made before now of Mr. and Mrs. Cowper Temple, and of their house at Broadlands. He was one of the two Trustees of the St. George's Fund, while she had been one of Ruskin's child friends at Winnington, and had since been the confidante of his love for Rose.

Even before Rose's death she had already been the means of Ruskin's attending a number of séances.

This winter (1875), Ruskin twice stayed with them at Broadlands. Frederick Myers and Gurney were of the party

and also a medium – a 'Mrs. W.' – whom Mrs. Cowper Temple had the power of throwing into a trance.

Ruskin was very much impressed by what he saw, and wrote in December to Professor Charles Norton that he had seen a lady who had had the Stigmata, that 'Mrs. W.' had seen the shade of Rose standing beside him, and that just after this last vision had been seen, he had recovered the most precious of the letters Rose had ever written to him. It had been among those he had returned to her when they parted, and now it had been sent back to him again.

> 'I'm as giddy as if I had been thrown off Strasburg steeple,' he writes, 'and stopped in the air.'

But there was more to come. Myers says that someone in the company had a vision – 'as of a longed-for meeting of souls beloved in heaven – a vision whose detail and symbolism carried conviction to Ruskin's heart.'

Ruskin's new belief in Christianity was very much confirmed by what he saw at Broadlands and he became absolutely sure of survival after death, while for a time he trusted with quiet happiness in the goodness of the unseen Powers.

Though his melancholy returned, yet as a result of this experience, and of his visions and dreams at Assisi, he always kept some sort of fitful belief in the reality of ministering spirits.

Fors, but for a brilliant flash or two, is tiresome about 1875–6. Ruskin dislikes tobacco, the emancipation of women, railways, Positivism; and he can't get away from scolding comparisons of times past with the present.

The habit of trying to cram too much into everything he writes is growing, for he is beginning to ask himself at fifty-six how much time he is likely to have left in which to finish all he has in hand. So far, he says petulantly, his work has only been the collecting of materials.

'Of these materials I have now enough by me for a most interesting (in my own opinion) history of fifteenth-century Florentine Art, in six octavo volumes; an analysis of the Attic art of the fifth century B.C. in three volumes; an exhaustive history of northern thirteenth-century art, in ten volumes; a life of Sir Walter Scott, with analysis of modern epic art, in seven volumes; a life of Xenophon, with analysis of the general principles of education, in ten volumes; a commentary on Hesiod, with final analysis of the principles of Political Economy, in nine volumes; and a general description of the geology and botany of the Alps, in twenty-four volumes.'

In the May of 1876 Ruskin was for the third time re-elected Slade Professor. But he did not feel fit to lecture and complains in his diary of 'a quite terrible languor.' Dr. Parsons of Hawkshead, his usual doctor when he was at Brantwood, told him that he wanted nothing but rest.

He determined at least to try a change of scene.

One of his admirers at Oxford, Prince Leopold (otherwise Duke of Albany), had suggested to him that he should bring out another edition of *Stones of Venice*.

This Ruskin decided to do, and he set off for Italy at the end of August, 1876. But he worked as usual, even when he was travelling, and, arrived in Venice, set himself seriously to study Carpaccio. He had for a long while, half in fancy and half in earnest, traced the parallel between his lost Rose and Dante's lost Beatrice. Now he added St. Ursula and made a trinity. He had Carpaccio's picture of St. Ursula asleep brought down from where it had been skied at the Accademia, and began to copy it, with intense pleasure in the charm of its finish and its sentiment.

Two Oxford pupils whom he met there were also set to copy and study for him. These young men seem greatly to

have pleased Ruskin – 'So much nicer they are than I was at their age,' he observed of them.

By November Ruskin was still in Venice, but vexed with his work again.

> 'I never was yet, in my life (he wrote to his friend and neighbour, old Miss Beever, at Coniston), in such a state of hopeless confusion of letters, drawings and work: chiefly because, of course, when one is old, one's *done* work seems all to tumble in upon one, and wants rearranging. . . . I can't *fix* my mind on a sum in addition – it goes off, between seven and nine, into a speculation on the seven deadly sins or the nine muses. My table is heaped with unanswered letters, – MS. of four or five different books at six or seven different parts of each, – sketches getting rubbed out, – others getting smudged in, – parcels from Mr. Brown unopened, parcels *for* Mr. Moore unsent; my inkstand in one place, – too probably upset, – my pen in another; my paper under a pile of books, and my last carefully written note thrown into the waste-paper basket.'

The copy – it was to be a facsimile of the St. Ursula picture – was difficult too. 'Oh me, her hair!' he exclaims. Yet she seems more and more like Rose, and as he works at his picture he finds despair, at the muddle he is in with his writing, give place to a kind of joy and quietness. *Fors* is full of St. Ursula. They have put the picture in a private room so that he can work at his copying as long as he likes, sometimes he has his assistants with him, sometimes he is alone.

> 'Fancy (he writes to Mrs. Severn) having St. Ursula right down on the floor in a good light and leave to lock myself in with her. . . . There she lies so real, that when the room's quite quiet, I get afraid of waking her!'

At last, on Christmas Day (1876), he had an attack of severe pain. After it was over he lay in a dreamy state in which for a long time St. Ursula, who was also Rose, stood beside him. He found himself in a state of gentle happiness, and, when the vision faded, he came back to a sense of renewed strength, and the conviction that after all, a gentle God with sweet ministers, did watch over the world.

§ 5

In May, 1877, he travelled home with George Allen, with the mood of softness and reconciliation still upon him. But this sense of reassurance seems to have been patchy and unreliable. It was, for instance, in the *Fors* for July, 1877, that the famous libel on Whistler appeared, while the earlier summer numbers are scarcely gentle.

The July *Fors* (Letter 79), however, outdid them all in peevishness, and along with some sensible remarks about Millais and some laudatory ones about Burne-Jones, Ruskin managed to abuse and libel quite a number of people in it.

An economist, whom he knew personally, called Goldwin Smith, is briefly called 'a goose,' and his inquiries into commercial history, ancient and modern, are declared 'never to have reached so far as the origin of the adulteration of butter.'

A favourite Aunt Sally fairly has her pipe knocked down her throat, so violent are Ruskin's shies.

> 'The Professorship of Sir Henry Cole at Kensington has corrupted the system of art teaching all over England into a state of abortion and falsehood from which it will take twenty years to recover.'

Soon Whistler (who had been asking for trouble with his usual skill) comes in for his share of a general belabouring.

There was an exhibition of pictures at the Grosvenor Gallery and Whistler had priced two or three of his Thames 'nocturnes' pretty highly. Ruskin was furious, and his memory proved as short as his temper.

> 'For Mr. Whistler's own sake, no less than for the protection of the purchaser, Sir Coutts Lindsay ought not to have admitted works into the Gallery in which the ill-educated conceit of the artist so nearly approaches the aspect of wilful imposture. I have seen and heard much of Cockney impudence before now; but never expected to hear a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face.'

Not one of the best examples of his abuse, the reader will agree. It has been suggested that Ruskin showed that his memory was short. Later, when Whistler brought his action, Ruskin (who, as will be seen, was not fit to attend the court) had his defence based largely on the lack of finish in Whistler's pictures. His counsel harps again and again on the impossibility of recognizing the figures and other details of the landscape. Ruskin had forgotten the time when Turner left his old ways and painted pictures that were 'arrangements' in colour, studies of air and light, pictures that the old stagers laughed at or abused. Then, when Turner was being accused by *Blackwood* of painting 'trees like brooms, and cows made of white paper'; of 'streaking together white gamboge, and raw sienna, and throwing the whole into a flour tub,' it had been Ruskin who had defended boldness, innovation, and speed of execution. Turner in his *Juliet and her Nurse* had, in Ruskin's words, painted 'the many coloured mists of the distant city' and had been defended by the young Ruskin. Now, when Whistler did it, Ruskin was old, and in his turn wanted to roll up the arts, to set bounds, and to forbid experiment for the strange reason that it might be unsuccessful.

§ 6

The fact is, surely, that somebody ought to have stopped that whole unbalanced number of *Fors*, or else that when it did come out, Whistler should have disregarded his libel, as Cole and Goldwin ignored theirs.

Yet, before Whistler is blamed for bringing his action, it must be remembered that in the 'seventies the great public, which was very unwilling to give up its oracles, had not yet noticed that there was anything odd about its art critic. What Ruskin said still went, if not any longer in the art world, still very effectually in the world of dealers and buyers. His pronouncements may seem to us to show that he was in a state which was just going to tip him over the edge of sanity; but this was not clear to his contemporaries.

We know that Ruskin went mad a few months after he libelled Whistler, but it is fair to remember that all Whistler could know was that an absurd, unbalanced attack had been made on him by the Dalai Lama of the art-buying public.

If Whistler behaved meanly, it was certain that Ruskin had made an exhibition of himself. There is not another word in *Fors* about Whistler, and as an isolated paragraph, without a word of *raisonnement*, the three little sentences seem indefensible. Perhaps some people may draw from the incident the moral that an ordinary commercial publishing house may have its uses. No regular publisher would have passed that number of *Fors*. But most probably George Allen was not in a position to refuse to print it.

Actually Ruskin's worst attack of madness came upon him between the bringing of the action and the hearing of the case, so that Whistler, to whom the jury awarded a farthing damages, had it all his own way when the hearing came, and was able to laugh at his ease in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, at one of the greatest masters of invective and abuse whose inventions ever adorned our language. Whistler

would not have had it all his own way if the old lion had been able to defend himself. However, it must be admitted that he gives his digs amusingly. His method is to give the reader an abstract of the case, and of the pontifications of the Judge, the Attorney-General, of *The Times* Critic, of Burne-Jones (Ruskin's chief witness), and of Frith. On to all these Whistler pours his characteristic rifle-fire from the margin, sitting there on the edge of the page like an unlocated sniper who lies in some attic window and snipes the big artillery column as it rumbles through the street below.

His treatment of the speech of the Attorney-General is characteristic.

What were the figures at the top of the bridge? And if they were horses and carts, how in the name of fortune were they to get off? Now, about these pictures, if the plaintiff's argument was to avail, they must not venture publicly to express an opinion, or they would have brought against them an action for damages.

After all, Critics had their uses.[1] He should like to know what would become of Poetry, of Politics, of Painting, if Critics were to be extinguished? Every Painter struggled to obtain fame.

No Artist could obtain fame except through criticism.[2]

. . . As to these pictures, they could only come to the conclusion that they were strange fantastical conceits, not worthy to be called works of Art.

[1] '*I have now given up ten years of my life to the single purpose of enabling myself to judge rightly of art . . . earnestly desiring to ascertain, and to be able to teach the truth respecting art; also knowing that this truth was by time and labour definitely ascertainable.*' – Prof. RUSKIN: *Modern Painters*, Vol. III.

[2] '*Canaletto, had he been a great painter, might have cast his reflection wherever he chose . . . but he is a little and a bad painter.*' – Mr. RUSKIN, Art Critic.

'*Thirdly, that TRUTHS OF COLOUR ARE THE LEAST IMPORTANT OF ALL TRUTHS.*' – Mr. RUSKIN, Prof. of Art: *Modern Painters*, Vol. I, Chap. V.

'*I repeat there is nothing but the work of Prout which is true, living, or right in its general impression, and nothing, therefore, so inexhaustively* agreeable' (*sic*). – J. RUSKIN, Art Professor: *Modern Painters.*

. . . Coming to the libel, the Attorney-General said it had been contended that Mr. Ruskin was not justified in interfering with a man's livelihood. But why not? Then it was said, 'Oh! you have ridiculed Mr. Whistler's pictures!' If Mr. Whistler disliked ridicule, he should not have subjected himself to it by exhibiting publicly such productions. If a man thought a picture was a daub [1] he had a right to say so, without subjecting himself to a risk of an action.

He would not be able to call Mr. Ruskin, as he was far too ill to attend; but, if he had been able to appear, he would have given his opinion of Mr. Whistler's work in the witness-box.

[1] '*Now it is evident that in Rembrandt's system, while the contrasts are not more right than Veronese, the colours are all wrong from beginning to end.*' – John Ruskin, Art Authority.

'*And that colour is indeed a most unimportant characteristic of objects, would be further evident on the slightest consideration. The colour of plants is constantly changing with the season . . . but the nature and essence of the thing are independent of these changes. An oak is an oak, whether green with spring, or red with winter; a dahlia is a dahlia, whether it be yellow or crimson; and if some monster hunting florist should ever frighten the flower blue, still it will be a dahlia; but not so if the same arbitrary changes could be effected in its form. Let the roughness of the bark and the angles of the boughs be smoothed or diminished, and the oak ceases to be an oak; but let it retain its universal structure and outward form, and though its leaves grow white, or pink, or blue, or tri-colour, it would be a white oak, or a pink oak, or a republican oak, but an oak still.*' – John Ruskin, Esq., M.A., Teacher and Slade Prof. of Fine Arts: *Modern Painters.*

REFLECTION:

'*In conduct and in conversation,*
It did a sinner good to hear
Him deal in ratiocination.'

And so Whistler runs on for several pages, and is both

damaging and amusing. The fun cost the parties about £400 apiece, while Whistler ever after wore his farthing damages on his watch-chain.

But somehow the usual butterfly, with which Whistler signs the chapter which has been quoted, looks little like a scorpion.

However this description of the Whistler action is an anticipation.

The libel was published in July, 1877, while the case was not heard till November, 1878, and between those two dates poor Ruskin was to suffer things that hurt him far more than Whistler's war dance.

CHAPTER XXXIII

1877–1882: Aged 58–63

THE PEACOCK

'Away! the foul fiend follows me!
Through the sharp hawthorn blows the cold wind.
Hum! go to thy cold bed and warm thee!'
King Lear

§ 1

The twelve lectures that he gave in the October after the libel had appeared were rather successful. And there is a welcome touch of satisfaction in his accounts of them and of a visit to his old pupil Prince Leopold at Windsor.

He paid a visit too in January, 1878, to the Gladstones at Hawarden. He had known Gladstone slightly for many years, while Mrs. Drew, Gladstone's daughter, had been one of his drawing-pupils. It was she who arranged the visit, and got over the prejudice against Gladstone which had been left to Ruskin by Carlyle. The opportunity was a good one, for there was now a new bond. Ruskin's last Oxford lecture had been reprinted in the *Nineteenth Century*. In this he had affirmed, 'The reality of the ministrations of good angels,' as also of bad ones. This declaration had (according to Sir E. T. Cook) profoundly stirred Mr. Gladstone, and he had told Ruskin as much when he had dined with them in London.

But all the same, Ruskin was by no means sure that he was going to enjoy Hawarden, and was timid and suspicious. He arranged an emergency exit for himself in the shape of a telegram which might at any time summon him home. A

fellow-guest describes the situation. 'This telegram loomed largely the first day, and we were constantly under its menace; but hour by hour he grew happier, and references to its possible arrival came more and more rarely, and presently it became purely mythical.'

The two men in fact ended by charming each other. Ruskin's freshness and frankness set off Gladstone's more pontifical manner to perfection. Both of them were on their best behaviour, and are said to have 'displayed in perfection the graces of old-world courtesy.'

By the end of the visit Ruskin was completely convinced of Gladstone's 'simple, most kindly, and unambitious character,' and found it beautiful to see Gladstone with his family. 'His naïve delight in showing me his trees went straight to my heart.'

§ 2

From Hawarden Ruskin went on to Brantwood. It would probably have been very much better if he could have gone on with the round of visits with which the year began, for he was very wretched – he could not rest, and felt too languid to work. This was a bad state of things for a man who had never learned to play. He knew quite certainly that his mind was behaving oddly.

> 'My own feeling now (he wrote in a preface to the work of an Oxford pupil) is that everything which has hitherto happened to me and been done by me, whether well or ill, has been fitting me to take greater fortune more prudently, and to do better work more thoroughly. And just when I seemed to be coming out of school – very sorry to have been such a foolish boy, yet having taken a prize or two, and expecting now to enter upon some more serious business than cricket – I am dis-

missed by the Master I hoped to serve with a "That's all I want of you, sir." '

Everything he wrote in the beginning of that year (1878) shows the coming of a storm. He writes an ominous dream in his diary.

> 'A most strange nightmare of overturning a great sarcophagus down a hill in some ornamental Tuileries-like gardens, and sneaking away for fear of being caught. Nobody else in the gardens for a mile; and getting into an ugly town and not being able to support conversation properly! And always wondering – when the police would come after me – finishing off with being left by an express train without courage to get into the carriage, every one going faster and faster past me – like these days of January.'

He writes another preface, this time to an exhibition of Turners which is to be held in Bond Street. 'Turner's health,' he wrote, 'and with it in a great degree his mind, failed suddenly with snap of some vital cord.' Then the thought of his own sorrow floods him, and in his Brantwood study, looking out across the water, he writes a little lament that was to become famous.

> 'Morning breaks as I write, along these Coniston fells, and the river mists, motionless and grey beneath the rose of the moorlands, fill the lower woods and the sleeping village and the long lawns by the lakeshore. Oh, that someone had but told me in my youth, when all my heart seemed to be set on these colours and clouds, that appear for a little while and then vanish away, how little my love of them would serve me when the silence of lawn and wood in the dews of morning should be completed; and all my thoughts should be of those whom, by neither, I was to meet more.'

Fors tells the same story almost more heartbreakingly. For it is not only the thunder on the moors, and the music of the verse, that makes up the emotion of the heath-scene in Lear; but the small confusion and misery. There is a triviality and a breaking-away of familiar footholds, that makes some passages of *The Snow Cradle* in the highest degree pathetic.

He begins the letter fairly coherently, speaks about a quarrel with Miss Octavia Hill, which had distressed him very much, has a word of praise for Voltaire and of disparagement for Miss Martineau, and one of apology for having spoken slightingly of Mr. Gladstone. But with every few paragraphs he feels himself getting angry. Then he breaks off to turn to another less agitating subject, only to find that the Turkish question, or the contemporary Press, even St. Jerome, lead him back to fretfulness and anger. Somehow, at last, he finds himself side-tracked from everything he meant to write about, into retranslating bits of the Bible.

> [1] 'Why do the heathen rage?' (The heathen of the British public?) 'Nor is the word "rage" the right one, in the least. It means to "fret idly," like useless sea, – incapable of *real* rage, or of *any* sense, – foaming out only its own shame. . . . In the fourth verse, observe that the "anger" of the Lord is the *mind* in which He speaks to the kings; but His "fury" is the *practical* stress of the thunder of His power, and of the hail and death with which He "troubles" them and torments. Read *this* following piece of evening's news, for instance. It is one of thousands such. That is what is meant by "He shall vex them in his sore displeasure," which words you have chanted to your pipes and bellows so sweetly and so long, – "His so-o-o-ore displea-a-sure." But here is the *thing*, nearly at your doors,

[1] *Fors*, Letter 87.

reckoning by railway distance. "The mother got impatient, thrust the child into the snow, and hurried on – not looking back." But *you* are not "vexed," you say? No, – perhaps that is because you are so very good. And perhaps the muffins will be as cold as the snow, too, soon, if you don't eat them.'

After another line or two, somehow the Duke of Argyll and Mr. George Dawson come in. Then he breaks off and says: 'Have patience with me. I'm not speaking as I didn't mean to. I want you to read, and attentively, some things that the Duke of Argyll and Mr. Dawson have said; but you must have the caterpillar washed out of the cabbage, first. I want you to read, – ever so many things. First of all, and nothing else till you have well mastered that, the history of Montenegro given by Mr. Gladstone in the *Nineteenth Century* for May, 1877.'

Finally, there is a Baptist minister at Tredegar who tells him how the miners have been working about a day and a half per week in his parish for months now, and have earned an average of 6*s*. a week. So there are one or two days each week for some hundreds of families in Tredegar when they are without anything to eat and have nothing but water to drink. Ruskin throws down his pen.

'Well – will they hear at last, then? Has Jael-Atropos at last driven her nail well down through the Helmet of Death he wore instead of the Helmet of Salvation – mother of Sisera?'

When the Turner Exhibition opened, Ruskin was admitted to be dangerously ill. His biographers speak of inflammation of the brain, symptoms of delirium and so forth; but Ruskin himself was later much more explicit. Not once but many times he dotted the i's and crossed the t's, and told the world what was, and had been, the matter with him.

[1] 'The doctors say I went mad from overwork. . . . I went mad because nothing came of my work. People would have understood my falling crazy if they had heard that the manuscripts on which I had spent seven years of my old life had all been used to light the fire like Carlyle's first volume of *The French Revolution*. But they could not understand that I should be the least annoyed, far less fall ill in a frantic manner, because, after I had got them published, nobody believed a word of them. . . . The second (the enduring calamity under which I toil) is humiliation, – resisted necessarily by dangerous and lonely pride.'

Day by day, the world read bulletins from Brantwood announcing first Ruskin's sudden and dangerous illness, and then a condition that grew no better. Newspapers all over the world copied the daily reports, and in the Far West of America, telegrams were posted, and much sympathy was shown, while in Italy he was prayed for.

§ 3

In England the weather was cold and windy. The storms swept over the mountains down upon Brantwood, the wind blew, and rain and sleet beat upon the window-panes. In the terraced garden that lay under Brantwood there was an old peacock that foretold rain with his croaking voice. As the sick man lay, or wandered about, upstairs, the peacock became a torment. As soon as the bird shrieked, Ruskin imagined himself in a farmyard, and impelled by a tyrant devil to do some fearful wrong, which he tried with all his might to resist.[2] But Evil was strong. Ruskin's passionate

[1] *Fors*, Letter 88.

[2] *British Medical Journal*, January 27, 1900: 'The late Mr. John Ruskin's Illness, described by himself.'

resistance always failed: and every time he did the wrong, he heard a voice utter a fiendish shriek of triumph. In his dream the voice was that of the demon, and in the world outside, it was the voice of the old peacock. This mocking symbol of his failure was (he told a doctor afterwards) 'more terrible than I can express in words.'

It was in the first few days that the worst crisis happened. One night Ruskin thought that the Devil himself was going to seize upon him. He felt sure that his only hope was to watch all night naked, and to wrestle with him.

> [1] 'I therefore took off all my clothing, though it was a bitter cold night, and there awaited the Evil One. I walked up and down my room, to which I had retired about eleven o'clock, in a state of great agitation, entirely resolute as to the approaching struggle. Thus I marched about my little room, growing at every moment into greater and greater exaltation. And so it went on till the dawn began to break, which at that time of year was rather late, about 7.30.'

It seemed to him very strange that after such a terrible, and irresistible conviction, nothing should have happened.

But the Devil is not cheated, and a last touch remained to be added to the scene. He walked to the window to make sure that the feeble blue light that he saw was really the dawn; and as he put out his hand to open the window, a large black cat sprang out from behind the mirror. Ruskin looked at it in horror, 'persuaded,' as he said later, 'that in spite of its insignificant form it was the foul fiend himself.' He rushed at it, grappled it in both his hands, and gathering all the strength that was in him, flung it as hard as he could against the floor. There was a dull thud, but nothing more.

[1] *British Medical Journal*, January 27, 1900: 'The late Mr. John Ruskin's Illness, described by himself.'

He waited, cowering in a corner, panting with exhaustion and terror, and expecting to see 'a malignant spectre.' But nothing happened. Gradually he became convinced that he had triumphed.

> 'Then, worn out with bodily fatigue, with walking and waiting and watching, my mind racked with ecstasy and anguish, my body benumbed with the bitter cold of a freezing night, I threw myself on the bed and became unconscious.'

There he was found later in the morning, in a state of prostration and 'completely bereft of his senses.' For a fortnight he remained in a state of wild delirium, of which he afterwards remembered nothing. He contrasts this time with one when he began to regain consciousness, but at the cost of being possessed by the most fearful thoughts – ' Demons in the dark formed gradually into corporeal shapes, almost too horrible to think of.' Fantastic imps, and devils, and witches, stared malignantly at him out of the furniture, as they do at children left too long in the dark. The mahogany bed-knob became a gibbering witch. When he recovered he sketched this spectre. 'I will show her to you later on,' he said to the doctor to whom he told these experiences.

There were interludes. If ugly things looked worse, beautiful things grew more beautiful. There were about twenty Turner drawings hung in two tiers round his small bedroom.

> 'They are absolutely perfect as they are, yet then they seemed a thousand times more lovely. The colours were brighter, and they looked in their splendour more like pictures of heaven than of earth. Even the patterns of the wall-paper and the curtains seemed transfigured.'

§ 4

By the end of March he was a little better, and by June his bodily health seemed good, while in mind, he is pathetically said to have shown 'no such fault as would strike casual observers.'

The doctors seem to have told his friends, just as they told him, that the breakdown had been due to overwork, and Sir John Simon writes as much to Charles Eliot Norton.

> 'You know, without my telling it, all that has brought this dreadful disaster on him, – the utterly spendthrift way in which (with imagination less and less controlled by judgment) he has for these last years been at work with a dozen different irons in the fire – each enough to engage one average man's mind.'

The patient himself and modern psychologists are, however, in agreement in thinking that overwork was the effect, not the cause, of his breakdown. The overwork was probably a refuge into which he tried to burrow when the conflicts which tore him became severe. Just as in common sorrows we turn to work as an anodyne, or as a means of self-expression, so, when his deep wounds became unbearable, Ruskin tried to hide from pain behind a heaped study table, and managed to forget himself in the incomparable prose through which his twisted heart found expression.

At the end of July he has gone to London for a change and is writing from Herne Hill to Norton:

> 'I've got most of my strayed wits together again, for better or worse, and have for the present locked the gate they got out at, and they seem all pretty quiet and very much ashamed of themselves, so I hope the best for them. The doctors say it was overwork and worry, which is partly true, and partly not. More overwork

and worry might have soon ended me, but it would not have drive me crazy. I went crazy about St. Ursula and the other saints, – chiefly young-lady saints, – and I rather suppose had offended the less pretty Fors Atropos, till she lost her temper. But the doctors know nothing either of St. Ursula or St. Kate, or St. Lachesis – and not much else of anything worth knowing.

'The chief real danger of the delirium, I believe, was not in the brain disease itself, which was a temporary inflammation, running its course, and passing, but in the particular form it took during the first stages of recovery – the (quite usual, I believe, in such cases) refusal to eat anything; not that I didn't want to, but I wouldn't take it out of a cup with a rose on it, or the like, – and so on, till poor Joan was at her wits' end, nearly – but her wits were longer than mine, and held on. How she ever got through it, I can't think, for I took to calling her hard names at one time, and didn't know her at another.

'However, here she is, and well; and here I am, not much the worse in looks, people say.'

It was after his recovery from this illness that some of Ruskin's friends in England and America paid him a charming tribute.

Ruskin regarded Turner's Alpine drawings of 1842 as the climax of his work. The first and the best of this series was a drawing of the Splügen, which had been quickly bought up, and taken off to Scotland by its purchaser, when James Ruskin was away. Ruskin had tried to trace it, but had never been able to get it back.

Without telling him a word of the business, 'a wide circle' of Ruskin's admirers now managed to trace the drawing, subscribed its price of 1,000 guineas, and presented it to

Ruskin 'as a token of sympathy and respect.' Ruskin was very much pleased by the kindness of such a present.

A month or so after receiving the drawing he is writing with pleased surprise to tell Norton that he has actually passed a week of total idleness, to the satisfaction of his doctors, 'and no great discomfort to myself. . . . The practice of doing nothing inures me to that hardship far more quickly than could have been expected.' But in fact he was working at a botany book called *Proserpina*, and on a book on æsthetics called *The Laws of Fésole*. He did not stay in London for long, but went back to Brantwood, issuing thence in March, 1879, to give evidence against a former assistant who had been had up for forgery. But for the rest, he was mostly at Brantwood, and trying very hard to divert himself. One of his efforts included the designing of a rowing-boat which a local boat-builder made him of larch. She was called *The Jumping Jenny*, had a narrow stern seat for one, and a bow like the boats on the Lago di Garda. Neighbouring boat-builders came from far and near and approved of her.

He had already resigned from the Oxford professorship, and was making great efforts to cut down his work, though as usual everybody had to be put to rights.

> [1] 'I'm doing the Laws of Plato thoroughly (he tells Norton). Jowett's translation is a disgrace to Oxford, and how much to Plato cannot be said, and I must get mine done all the more. . . . Was your mother – to you – as mine to me, the inciter and motive-in-chief of what one did for praise? Not that she did not uphold me in all that was right – praised or not – but still – I would have done much to please her with the hearing of it only.'

Then he breaks off to give Norton a bit of news:

[1] *Letters to Charles Eliot Norton.*

'I wonder if it will give you any pleasure to hear that my museum is fairly now set afoot at Sheffield, and that I am thinking of living as much there as possible. The people are deeply interesting to me, and I am needed for them, and am never really quiet in conscience elsewhere.'

His disciple, Prince Leopold, opened the Museum for him, and Ruskin was able to go up there to receive him and to show him the studies from Carpaccio, the Madonna and Child by Veroccio, and the missals and precious stones.

In 1879 Ruskin is in general writing more calmly, and in 1880, when he went on again with *Fors* after a gap of two years, his tone is quieter than it had been for some time before the breakdown. However, he has some trenchant things to say for the encouragement of trade unionists, and in another place gets into controversy with a bishop.

In the spring of 1880 he was able to give a lecture in London, and was a candidate for the Glasgow Lord Rectorship.[1] In August he went to France to make studies for the *Bible of Amiens*. He saw a few visitors at Brantwood besides. Darwin came more than once, as did several young painters. Mr. Severn and Mr. Wedderburn used to have to warn them sometimes not to mind if Ruskin was occasionally cross and unreasonable.[2]

In the spring of 1879 he had been able to enjoy his walks with the Severn children among the anemones, and he was pleased because he had got his room into symbolic good order. Two old sisters, the Miss Beevers, who lived just across the lake and were kind to the squirrels and birds, would come to tea, and send him asparagus or strawberries. Flowers were delightful to him again, and he looked at them with lovers' eyes, seeing how the dew deepened the red of a

[1] See facsimile letter and Appendix.

[2] See 'A girl's friendship with Ruskin,' *Cornhill*, February, 1927 (etc.).

sweet-william, and how the little round whortle-berry blossoms shone. Disciples came to see him, and the solid Brantwood drawing-room was cheerful with the Christy Minstrel songs that Ruskin liked.

But the good time did not last.

In 1881 Carlyle died, and Ruskin was taken ill a week or two after. Again, when snow lay on the mountains that rose across the lake opposite Brantwood, the delirium came back. There were sleepless nights and dreams that were 'grotesque, terrific, and inevitable.' Presently the dreams invaded the day. Perhaps the delusions were not quite so strong as three years before, but they were once more 'visions of Hell.' He recovered, but found it hard to shake off the memory of what he had suffered in the month of his delirium. He writes about it quite freely to Norton:

> 'I've just read your dear letter to me on my birthday, after another bite or two of Nebuchadnezzar's bitter grass. I went wild again for three weeks or so, and have only just come to myself – if this be myself, and not the one that lives in dream.'

He read *Past and Present* while he was ill, and writes of how lonely he felt now Carlyle was dead. People seemed to get more separated from him as they went on into the modern world and he lived more in the past. 'I go back to live with my father and my mother and my nurse once more – all waiting for me in the land of the Leal.'

He did not make a very good recovery. Change of air (at Seascale in Cumberland) was tried, but he was still restless and irritable. His friends and secretaries found him heedless and headstrong all that year. In December, 1881, and in January, 1882, he seemed listless and depressed.

He went off to London, took the chair at a lecture, went to the pantomime and felt better. But in March, 1882, the delusions came back.

Mr. Collingwood, who was at that time one of his secretaries or assistants, wrote from Brantwood to Professor Norton:

> 'Please forgive me opening your letter, and be patient for an answer, because Mr. Ruskin is away from home, and unwell, as he has been for months; but now worse, so far as I can gather. It has been so difficult to approach him on any subject but the most commonplace, that though we have often tried to get him to send kind words to Cambridge [Massachusetts], he always turned the subject. His illnesses have mixed most of his oldest and best friends with delirious dreams and unkind hallucinations. That is why, and that's the only reason why, you don't hear from him. When I came to live here last summer I found him dreadfully altered; and am sure if you could see him for a day, you would find that it is not ill-feeling, but ill-health of mind and body, which makes him shy of reminiscences, and very irritably disposed even to those whom he endures about him. As soon as ever he is a little better, and I can summon up the courage, he shall have your note. . . . I'm under orders to save him all correspondence, and this is my excuse for what you might think impertinence.' [1]

By May he was better and was able to go to picture galleries, and even to dine out and go to the opera. But his next letter to Norton, written in the August of the same year (1882) from abroad, tells something of how he felt:

> [2] 'I had in mind to write to you for a month or two back, ever since shaking off my last illness, but one feels shy of writing after being so extravagantly and absurdly ill. I got faster better this time, because Sir William

[1] *Letters of John Ruskin to Charles Eliot Norton.* [2] *Ibid.*

> Gull got me a pretty nurse, whom at first I took for Death (which shows how stupid it is for nurses to wear black), and then for my own general Fate and Spirit of Destiny, and then for a real nurse . . . and slowly – and rather with vexation and desolation than any pleasure of convalescence – I came gradually to perceive things in their realities; but it took me a good fortnight from the first passing away of the definite delirium to reason myself back into the world.'

He went to Florence with Mr. Collingwood, and there he met Miss Alexander, one of the two women whose drawings he came to admire very much, and whose admiration and friendship helped him at this time. She was an American who had made a special study of Tuscan peasant life and folk-lore, which she recorded in a series of careful drawings, and (in beautiful script) versions of traditional songs and poems.

CHAPTER XXXIV

1882–1889: Aged 63–70

CASTING OFF

§ 1

The other woman artist in whose company and work he took pleasure was Kate Greenaway. They had a common friend in a cheerful painter called Stacy Marks, and when in 1879 Kate Greenaway published a little book of drawings and verses, called *Under the Window*, Marks showed it to Ruskin and got him to write to her. She had long been one of the admirers of *Fors Clavigera*, and immediately became a disciple.

Ruskin soon began – while praising her fancy and sentiment – to try to get her to draw feet 'less like mussel-shells,' 'leaves that didn't look as if they had been in curl-papers all night,' and generally to improve her drawing. She responded warmly, and in the May of 1880 she paid the first of many visits to Brantwood.

It became a standing joke that 'Kate' and 'Francesca' (Miss Alexander) were jealous of one another. In fact the two women, who seem to have been both of them gentle and kind, did a great deal with their easy sense of beauty and the Christian virtues, and with their supple admiration, to soothe him. He was often too much spent and exhausted to have enjoyed stronger art, or more demanding company.

By 1883 the correspondence between Ruskin and Kate

Greenaway was in full swing. More than a thousand letters and notes are said to have passed between them, while to the younger Miss Beever (one of the before-mentioned old ladies who lived across the lake from Brantwood) he wrote nearly two thousand notes and letters. A note he once wrote to her from abroad shows, with all Ruskin's pretty exactness, what he sought and found in the company of these good gentlewomen:

> 'Your letters (he writes) always warm me a little, not with laughing, but with the soft glow of life – for I live mostly with "la mort dans l'âme." . . . Your words and thoughts just soften and warm like west wind.'

§ 2

Ruskin felt much better after the tour in the autumn of 1882, and early in 1883 he was rather unwisely re-elected Slade Professor. His lectures in this last term were a worry to the people who loved and respected him. He behaved very oddly, he was violent and provocative, he praised Kate Greenaway and Miss Alexander extravagantly.

Charles Eliot Norton came to England on a visit, after a ten years' gap, and was very much struck by the alteration in his looks at this time.

When he had seen him last, before Rose's death, Ruskin had been 'a man in vigorous middle life, young for his years, erect in figure, alert in action, full of vitality, with smooth face and untired eyes.' These ten years had made of him 'an old man, with look even older than his years, with bent form, with the beard of a patriarch, with habitual expression of weariness, with the general air and gait of age.' But his charm had not left him. Ruskin's delightful smile could still shine and break into warmth, and now and then a strange youthfulness would reassert itself and take control

of the old man's body. Sometimes the former gaiety of mood took possession of him. Then Ruskin, like the Turner drawings, seemed to be supernaturally charming. It was as if the fires blazed up all the brighter because they were fitful.

It can be guessed that such a man could be embarrassing on a platform, before an audience of undergraduates who had heard too much about him and his virtue, and who came for a lark. However, he lectured without any public scandal all through 1883.

It is touching to record that among the kindest of his friends was now Jowett, who had once disliked him so much, but who had now begun to care for him. Coming to stay with him at Brantwood, Jowett[1] said he would never forget the kind welcome that Ruskin gave him. 'He is the gentlest and most innocent of mankind, of great genius but inconsecutive, and he has never rubbed his mind against others, so that he is ignorant of very obvious things.' Jowett had him to stay when he was at Oxford, and could often control him and turn him off a dangerous subject and generally make it possible for him to mix in general company.

§ 3

In the autumn of 1884 he was again to give a course of lectures. The first two went off fairly well, for these were printed before the course began, and he stuck to his MS. But in the next two, which he had prepared much less thoroughly, the digressions and ironic interpolations were extraordinary, though sometimes effective. In one or two of the lectures, feeling himself getting on to dangerous ground, he only spoke for half an hour. The lectures were crowded, and the applause and excitement were not at all good for Ruskin, whose mind was dangerously speeded up

[1] *Jowett's Life and Letters.*

by them. A good many of the undergraduates came, as has been said, with the idea of seeing what 'old Ruskin' would do next.

Finally, towards the end of November, 1884, there came a lecture so disjointed as to cause not only ribald amusement among the undergraduates, but grave scandal among the dons. The newspapers became critical, and in one paper the lectures were spoken of as 'an academic farce.' Ruskin's friends felt that something must be done, especially as he had confided to them that the lectures for December were to be devoted to chastising the men of science and to protesting against the setting up of a Physiological Laboratory in the University, on the grounds that it would be, or might be, used for vivisection. Sir Henry Acland, Arthur MacDonald, Jowett, and some of his other friends, intervened, and persuaded him to substitute, for the controversial lectures, one on birds, and one on landscape.

In Ruskin's mind what had happened was that the scientists, frightened of his criticism, had conspired to stop his mouth.

Ruskin left Oxford at the end of the term, feeling very tired and worn-out, but fully intending to go back there. But on March 10, 1885, the setting-up of the Physiological Laboratory was decided upon by vote. Ruskin resigned on March 22. A kindly paragraph in a London paper endeavoured to soften Ruskin's act by pointing out that his resignation would ease him of a burden, give him leisure to finish the many books he had in the Press, and to write the promised autobiography. Ruskin wrote at once to the editor to say that he had not resigned because he felt his powers failing or because he wanted to do other work, but solely on account of the vote, 'endowing vivisection.' It is significant that the Vice-Chancellor did not read his letter of resignation in Convocation as Ruskin asked him to do, nor did the *University Gazette* print another letter which Ruskin sent

them for publication. No doubt the suppressions were tactful and kind.

Sir E. T. Cook says that a few weeks later he was talking to Ruskin and asked him why exactly he had resigned. 'Double motives are very useful things,' said Ruskin. 'You can do a thing for two that you could not for one.'

Brantwood seemed miserable to him when he went back to it after his resignation at Oxford. He felt that he had 'fallen into a ditch of despond, deepened by loss of appetite and dark weather.' Mrs. Severn was in London. He fears that old age is going to be a weary time for him; but he resolves not to mew about it like Carlyle, nor 'make Joanie miserable.' He writes to Norton and says what he thinks of the epistolary complainer:

> [1] 'Carlyle's, like all the words of him published since his death, have vexed me, and partly angered, with their perpetual "me miserum" – never seeming to feel the extreme ill manners of this perpetual whine; and . . . hiding of the more or less of pleasure which a strong man must have in using his strangth, be it but in heaving aside dust-heaps.
> 'What in my own personal way I chiefly regret and wonder at in him is, the perception in all nature of nothing between the stars and his stomach – his going, for instance, into North Wales for two months, and noting absolutely no Cambrian thing or event, but only increase of Carlylian bile.'

He knew that he had in fact 'mewed' a good deal himself, so he finishes the letter off cheerfully:

> 'I came here (Oxford) from Brantwood through driving snow – sprinkling, but vivious in the whiffs – and found people glad to see me, and elbowing each other

[1] *Letters of J. R. to C. E. N.*

to hear, so that I had to give the one lecture I had ready for them twice over. It will be in print next week, and quickly sent you. . . .'

§ 4

But the storms of madness did not leave him alone for long. In July, 1885, he had his fourth illness. Sometimes he would stay for a longish stretch of time at Brantwood: sometimes he would try, with Mr. Collingwood or one of the Severns, or sometimes alone, whether Sandgate or a tour abroad might do him good. He would sometimes write to Norton in the tone of the beautiful *apologias* in *Mrs. Dalloway*.[1]

> 'It is curious that I really look back to all those illnesses, except some parts of the first, with a kind of regret to have come back to the world. Life and Death were so wonderful, mingled together like that – the hope and fear, the scenic majesty of delusion so awful – sometimes so beautiful. In this little room, where the quiet prosy sunshine is resting quietly on my prosy table – last year, at this very time, I saw the stars rushing at each other – and thought the lamps of London were gliding through the night into a World Collision. I took my pretty Devonshire farm-girl Nurse for a Black Vision of Judgment; when I found I was still alive, a tinkly Italian organ became to me the music of the Spheres.'

The children at Coniston must have been sorry when he went away. He had a beautiful astral globe made for them and put in the school playground. But better still, every Saturday when he was at home, he used to have a dozen little girls from the school, to come across the lake to a lesson

[1] Virginia Woolf.

and tea. The lessons were wandering enough; he would teach them anything, from the variations in the shapes of fir-cones to the correct position on the map of Riblah in the Land of Hamath. There was always a bit of the Bible and some botany. But the girls liked him, and were not in the least afraid of him, and behaved to him with aloof indulgence. 'He's a foony man is Meester Ruskin, boot he likes oos to tek a good tea.'

He made real efforts to lead a sensible life, and divert his mind, for the attacks were too terrible to be lightly risked. He walked in the sweet mountain air, he climbed and sat in the sun, and he writes of going out to row on the lake in as strong a wind as he could hold the boat against, with his dear Kate Greenaway sitting in the stern of the *Jumping Jenny*.

One point he made very clear in his dealings with his friends. They were not to moralize to third parties about his illnesses, however much he might choose to do so himself. He snaps amusingly at poor Norton on one occasion for having done this, and tells him tartly that, after all, John Ruskin is still able to count his blessings.

> 'Your note to Joan of the 13th is extraordinarily pious, for *you*! and not a bit true! It is not the Lord's hand, but my own folly, that brings these illnesses on me; and as long as they go off again, you needn't be so mighty grave about them. How many wiser folk than I go mad for good and all, or bad and all, like poor Turner at the last, Blake always, Scott in his pride, Irving in his faith, and Carlyle because of the poultry next door!'

The attack of 1887 was a particularly bad one. Laurence Hilliard, one of his secretaries, had died suddenly of pleurisy in Greece. Ruskin had been very fond of him, and this time his delusions took the form of acute persecution mania.

'There are letters written at such times,' says Cook, 'which should be destroyed, and there are incidents that need not be recalled.' Mr. Collingwood was one of the much-tried and devoted people who looked after him. He writes of the period with sweetness and wisdom:

> [1] 'All that I now remember of many a weary night and day is the vision of a great soul in torment, and through purgatorial fires the ineffable tenderness of the real man emerging, with his passionate appeal to justice and baffled desire for truth. To those who could not follow the wanderings of the wearied brain it was nothing but a horrible or a grotesque nightmare. Some, in those trials, learnt, as they could not otherwise have learnt, to know him, and to love him as never before.'

Ruskin was certainly blessed in some of his disciples and companions.

He went to London for a time in 1887.

There are several people still alive who have described to the writer how his old bent figure would be seen occasionally, wandering about the British Museum, the Academy, or the exhibitions of the old Water-colour Society. He looked forlorn and strange, and people kept away from him. His was not a figure that invited small talk. He was very restless: from London he went to Sandgate, and finally abroad again. Early in June Mr. Arthur Severn went with him to Abbeville and Beauvais. For a little while the charm worked, and he felt better. Old habits held, and he wrote every day to Mrs. Severn. They drove up the hills of the Jura in crystal-clear sunshine, and down through dingles where the nightingales sang. The pine-trees were lovely, and it gave him joy to go back to the old inn at Sallenches where they remembered him.

[1] Collingwood, *Life of Ruskin*.

'To-day it was for the first time fine, like old times, and I've been up far among the granite boulders of the torrent, breaking stones in my old way. Life given back to me. And the stone-crop, and the ragged robin, on the granite among the moss.'

He felt so much better that they wandered on to Venice; but here old memories were too much for him. Feeling the symptoms of his illness coming on again, he had to go: he must 'get away from the elements of imagination which haunt me here.'

§ 5

His little moment of happiness in Switzerland had been a last gleam. Through the latter part of the tour he had been liable to fits of despondency. He had had queer delusions and impossible fancies; and in Paris on the way home he was taken seriously ill again. Mrs. Severn was sent for.

CHAPTER XXXV

1889–1900: Aged 70–81

THE LAST ELEVEN YEARS

'Ruskin s'était retiré dans la solitude où vont souvent finir les existences prophétiques jusqu'à ce qu'il plaise à Dieu de rappeler à lui le cénobite ou l'ascète dont la tâche surhumaine est finie.

'Et l'on ne peut que déviner à travers le voile tendu par des mains pieuses, le mystère qui s'accomplissait, la lente destruction d'un cerveau périssable qui avait abrité une postérité immortelle.'

Marcel Proust

§ 1

When Mrs. Severn came to Paris it was to find Ruskin worse than when he had set out. Delusions crowded upon him. Somehow he was got back to England, first to Herne Hill, and then to Brantwood.

Gradually he got a little better, and the thought returned to him that he must add to *Præterita*. He had not done the chapter which he called 'Joanie's care,' and he longed to pay a tribute to Mrs. Severn. But he was weak and his brain felt numb.

They took him to Cumberland to see what sea air would do.

There, at Seascale, he would sit in his bedroom with paper and ink before him, the diligent habits of his life still binding him. But morning after morning the paper would be blank for hours, while he tried to collect his thoughts. At last, line by line, with painful difficulty, he did manage to trace out his gratitude to Mrs. Severn. The thoughts and expressions wander, but they have something of his old grace.

He was patient and kindly now to those who were with him.

> 'These dared not show (writes Mr. Collingwood), though he could not but guess, how heartbreaking it was. They put the best face on it, of course; drove in the afternoons about the country – to Muncaster Castle, to Calder Abbey, where he tried to sketch once more; and, when the proofs of "Joanie's Care" were finally revised, to Wastwater for the night, – but travelling now was no longer restorative.'

When he came back to Brantwood in August, it was to suffer a worse attack than ever. The tide of madness rose, the waves closed over him again, and for nearly a year he never left his room. Autumn came, winter followed, and then spring, and for the first time Ruskin could not heed them.

§ 2

When this spring-tide went out, Ruskin was defeated. He wrote nothing more, and spoke very little; even his beautiful voice had shrunk to a whisper.

His old friend and dear neighbour, Susan Beever, lay on her death-bed. Ruskin wanted to write to her, and at last succeeded. This letter has been preserved. It is easy to see how his hand trembled. Towards the end of the eight lines, each stroke of each letter is formed with separate trouble. The note cost him three hours of painful work.

Mr. Walter Crane came to see him.

> 'He looked the shadow of his former self – the real living man with all his energy and force had gone, and only the shadow remained. He was carefully dressed and scrupulously neat, having gloves on, which, seeing

a visitor approach, he began to pull off rather absently, when Mrs. Severn said, "Never mind the gloves"; and I took his hand, but, alas! he had nothing but monosyllables, and soon went off, supported on the arm of his constant attendant. . . . Another time Mrs. Severn brought me into his room, where Ruskin sat in his armchair. He had a benign expression, and looked venerable and prophetic, with a long flowing beard, but he seemed disinclined to talk, and when I spoke of things which might have interested him, he only said yes or no, or smiled, or bowed his head.'

§ 3

When he was eighty, George Allen came to see him, speaking of Switzerland, and recalling old days at Mornex or Talloires. Ruskin seemed not to heed. But at last, looking at Allen and holding out his finger and thumb, he said in his ghost of a voice, 'They will never hold pen again.' Then he smiled softly, 'Perhaps it's as well, they have brought me into so much trouble.'

One night when Ruskin was going up to bed he lingered to look at a portrait of Edward Burne-Jones. 'That's my dear brother Ned,' he said, and nodded to the picture as he went.

Next day Edward Burne-Jones was dead.

§ 4

He could enjoy the sight of the mountains almost till his last short illness and he would be propped in a chair by his study window.

There for hours he would watch the weather change over the landscape. He watched the mist rising off Coniston Water, and the trees that glassed themselves in it. Or if a

wind crinkled the lake he would follow with his eyes the cloud shadows that followed each other over the mountain flanks.

'My Turners,' he said one day to Mrs Severn, 'seem to have lost something of their radiance.' Then he added, 'Well, the best in this sort are but shadows.'

His eightieth birthday – February 8, 1899 – brought a shower of telegrams, letters, and illuminated addresses from public bodies. The most formidable of these – signed by the Prince of Wales and a crowd of official personages – was solemnly presented by a deputation. Everybody wrote, the house was full of letters. All the newspapers printed his praises.

Ruskin sat with folded hands by his study window, his long white beard lying on the table before him, while his eyes looked out towards the bald head of the mountain opposite, Coniston Old Man. He did not very much care about addresses. He had seen those dream landscapes, and the stars rushing together. He knew very well that he had failed. They could praise him as much as they liked, but he had only succeeded in trivial things. In the chief things, his work had been in vain. But even that did not matter. He sat waiting, and did not care for fame, or even success.

§ 5

A year passed. The birthday had almost come round again. Still Ruskin sat white and still in his chair, ate and drank as he was told, was dressed or undressed. Sometimes he would speak, but for the most part he stayed in passive indifference.

On the morning of January 18, 1900, he seemed a little better than usual, and after tea Mrs. Severn went in to read him the war news.

His throat seemed irritable, and when Mrs. Severn asked

him how he did, he finally admitted that he felt pain all over. There was an influenza epidemic at Coniston that year. His valet Baxter put him to bed, and he seemed glad to lie down.

By half-past six he said he felt very comfortable. When the doctor came he was found to have a temperature of 102, notwithstanding which he was given (to keep up his strength) sole, pheasant, and champagne, for his dinner.

On Friday, while the winter lake lay like lead, and the storms chased each other through the hills, he seemed a little better.

But on Saturday morning it became plain that he was sinking. By noon he was unconscious; his breathing was rapid, light, and shallow. It grew slower but not deeper, and at last, in the quiet of the early winter afternoon, it faded altogether. Presently as he lay there dead, the setting sun dipped from under a bank of cloud, lit the lake, and filled the laps of the mountains with gold.

Cloud hills towered like fiery Alps over Yewdale and Coniston, while the sky glowed crimson. The shepherds on the hills stared to see such a sight.

§ 6

There is some law by which it seems – as we look at the lives of men in the past, or at the people about us – that even the most trivially placed human beings are ennobled by suffering, or by courage.

To Ruskin – the spoiled Puritan, the superior man in the blue neck-cloth, the fretful child of a hard, narrow culture, there came in the end the dignity of pain.

He had been mad for more than twenty years, when he died in the red mountain sunset, and he had suffered and seen many strange things. Life and Death had been so wonderful, the hope and fear, the scenic majesty of delusion so awful, that he had often felt half reluctant to come out of

that august world into whose darkness he had gone down so many times.

There are not very many human beings of whom we know as much as we do of Ruskin, for on few have the twin lights of self-revelation, and public observation, been so long, and so remorselessly, trained. Of Ruskin we have that extra trivial knowledge that we have of a fellow-traveller.

Yet in the end we see that he left pettiness behind him, and became at last no more a subject for condescension, than the explorer who dies alone – the martyr at the stake or in the electric chair – or the man who risks everything (as Ruskin never risked it) for an idea.

It has been suggested that because of the triple combination of his nature, upbringing, and epoch, Ruskin could do nothing but write and suffer, and that to no very satisfactory effect. He failed, and was too intelligent, and felt too deeply, to be blinded to the completeness of this failure, by a chorus of praise from amiable sycophants. By the time he died he had failed – not only in his chosen work – but in every vital relation of life.

That in the end he did not pretend, that ultimately his vanity dropped away, and that the subtle tragedy of his own fate, and the pretentious tragedy of his age, should have overwhelmed him lifts him out from among smug Victorian worthies.

Once more the dark gates of the arena have been shut – the arena where the conscious soul, the man who feels and hears, battles with the world – the arena where the champion of the simplicity and weakness of life, battles with the hard and brilliant cohorts of death.

We wait outside, not knowing what the upshot will be.

Will this champion join the self-satisfied audience of privilege and negation that sits, age after age, cracking nuts? Will he join them in watching life frustrated, and millions tramping a bewildered way down to disappointment and

death? Perhaps he may, for here is a man for whom privilege will make room. He can be assured to his heart's content that he is 'doing no good,' and had far better sit and enjoy himself. There is a good place laid for him at Trimalchio's feast.

But presently, while we wait for the end of the story, the slight, limp body is tossed back over the gate. He cut a slightly ridiculous figure over his martyrdom, we are told.

But that does not matter to us. He did not join the crackers of nuts, and he is dead.

CHRONOLOGY

PART I (1819–1846)

Date.	Chapter.	Event.	Locality.
1819	I, III, IV	Feb. 8, John Ruskin born, 54, Hunter Street, Brunswick Square	London
1823 Aged 4	,,	First tour (in S.W. of England). Removed to No. 28	Herne Hill
1826 Aged 7	,,	1st poem, 'The Needless Alarm.' Tour to the Lakes and Perth	,,
1828 Aged 9	,,	Mary Richardson adopted	,,
1830 Aged 11	,,	Tour to English Lakes	,,
1831 Aged 12	,,	First sketching from nature. Summer Tour in Wales. Began maths. under Rowbotham	,,
1832 Aged 13	,,	Given Rogers' *Italy*	,,
1833 Aged 14	,,	First Turner study in Rogers' *Italy*. Introduced to the Ettrick Shepherd (?) and Rogers. First Tour abroad.	,,

Date.	Chapter.	Event.	Locality.
		First meets Adèle Domecq	
1834 Aged 15	V	First published writings	Herne Hill
1835 Aged 16	,,	Contributes verses to annuals	,,
1836 Aged 17	,,	Visit of the Domecqs. First Love Poems. Lessons from Copley Fielding. Wrote Defence of Turner	,,
1837 Aged 18	VI	Jan. 14. Went into residence at Christ Church, Oxford	Oxford
		Began *Poetry of Architecture*	Herne Hill
		Began papers on 'The Convergence of Perpendiculars'	Oxford
1839 Aged 20	,,	Won the 'Newdigate'	,,
		Domecqs. Wrote *Farewell*	Herne Hill
		Kept Michaelmas Term at	Oxford
1840 Aged 21	VII	Threatened with consumption	,,
		June, introduced to Turner	Herne Hill
		Travelled with parents by the Loire and Riviera. Winter in Rome	Rome

Date.	Chapter.	Event.	Locality.
1841 Aged 22	VII	Still abroad. Cure at Euphemia Gray comes on a visit. Writes *King of the Golden River*	Leamington Herne Hill
1842 Aged 23	VIII	Took B.A. degree Saw Turner's Swiss sketches. Tour with parents: France, Switzerland and Germany. October, returned to *Modern Painters*, Vol. I, during winter at	Oxford Herne Hill Denmark Hill ,,
1843 Aged 24	,,	Oct. 28, took M.A. degree *Modern Painters* published	Oxford London
1844 Aged 25	,,	Collecting notes for *Modern Painters*, Vol. II	Denmark Hill
1845 Aged 26	,,	First tour alone; June 9, to Pisa; first study of 'Christian Art,' Florence. Italian Lakes. Verona. Tintorett at Venice During the winter wrote *Modern Painters*, Vol. II	Italy Denmark Hill
1846 Aged 27	,,	April, *Modern Painters* published	,,

Date.	Chapter.	Event.	Locality.
1847 Aged 28	IX	June: Oxford, Ambleside; July at	Leamington
		Aug., tour in Scotland; Sept. at	Crossmount
		Dec. at	Denmark Hill
		Reviews for *The Quarterly*	,,
1848 Aged 29	X	April 10, married at Perth. Summer, attempted pilgrimage to English cathedrals	
		Aug.–Oct., tour to Amiens, Paris	Normandy
	XI	Winter, writing *Seven Lamps*	31, Park St., London
1849 Aged 30	,,	April 18, tour without his wife but with his parents	France and Switzerland
		Settled for the winter with his wife	Venice
1850 Aged 31	XII	Studying architecture till end of Feb.	,,
		Wrote *Stones of Venice*, Vol. I	Park Street
1851 Aged 32	,,	*Construction of Sheepfolds*; acquaintance with Carlyle and Frederick Maurice	,,
	XIII	May, Defence of the Pre - Raphaelites	,,
		Acquaintance with	,,

Date.	Chapter.	Event.	Locality.
		Millais, Holman Hunt, Rossetti, etc.	
	XIV	Settled for winter (Sept. 1)	Venice
		J. M. W. Turner died (Dec.)	
1852 Aged 33	,,	Until the end of June studying architecture	,,
		Autumn and winter writing *Stones of Venice*, Vols. II and III	No. 29, Herne Hill
1853 Aged 34	XV	Aug., with his wife, Millais and a party at a cottage at	Glenfinlas
		Nov., his first lecture (architecture and painting)	Edinburgh
1854 Aged 35	XVI	Returned to Herne Hill. Euphemia leaves him (April). Tour with his parents	Herne Hill Switzerland
		July, marriage annulled	
		PART III	
1854 Aged 35	XVII	Return from tour with parents. Inauguration of Working Men's College. Winter,	Denmark Hill

Date.	Chapter.	Event.	Locality.
		lectures and work on 3rd vol. of *Modern Painters*	
1855 Aged 36	XVII	May, 1st No. *Academy Notes*. July and Aug., Tunbridge Wells and Deal. Working on *Modern Painters*, 3rd and 4th vols. Scheme for the Oxford Museum. Lectures, Working Men's College, etc.	Denmark Hill
1856 Aged 37	XVIII	April, Oxford Museum started. Apologia to Acland, May, *Academy Notes*. Summer, tour with parents. Winter, *Elements of Drawing*	,, Switzerland Denmark Hill
1857 Aged 38	,,	Winter, lectures. Spring, National Gallery. May, *Academy Notes*. Summer, *Political Economy of Art*	,, Manchester
		Tour with parents	Scotland
		Winter, back in London. Working Men's College. Arranging Turners at National Gallery	Denmark Hill

Date.	Chapter.	Event.	Locality.
1858 Aged 39	XVIII	Jan., lectures. Visit of Mrs. La Touche and Rose (Feb.). May, *Academy Notes*. Tour alone.	Denmark Hill Turin, Switzerland
		Working Men's College, lecture at	Cambridge
1859 Aged 40	XIX	Lectures at Working Men's College, Manchester and Bradford. March, at	Winnington
		May, *Academy Notes*. Disillusionment. Foreign tour.	London
		Nov., at	Winnington
		Writes *Elements of Perspective*. Writing *Modern Painters*, Vol. V	London
1860 Aged 41	,,	*Modern Painters* finished and published	,,
	,,	Evidence before the Public Institutions' Committee	
	XX	Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov., *Unto This Last* in *Cornhill*	Mornex
1861 Aged 42	,,	Spring, Lecture on Tree Twigs. Winnington Hall. Presents Turner drawings to Oxford and Cambridge. June,	London
		7 weeks' rest at	Boulogne

Date.	Chapter.	Event.	Locality.
	XXI	Aug., round of visits.	Winnington
		A few days with the La Touches in	Ireland
		Oct., abroad	Lucerne
			Bonneville
			Mornex
		Winter	Denmark Hill
1862	,,	May, abroad with	Switzerland
Aged 43		the Burne-Joneses.	Paris
		Studies of Luini	Milan, Geneva
		Aug., settled in lodgings. Began *Munera Pulveris*. Nov.,	Mornex
		came home	Denmark Hill
		Christmas, abroad again	Mornex
1863	,,	*Munera Pulveris* cut	
Aged 44		short. Letter to Norton. March,	
		Geology	Talloires
	XXII	May, lecture on geology to Royal Institution, Academy, etc.	Denmark Hill
		Winnington, with Burne-Joneses; round of visits	
		Sept., abroad.	Mornex,
		Plans to build super-chalet	Bonneville
		Leaves Switzerland.	Denmark Hill
		Autumn and winter, back in England	Winnington
			Manchester

Date.	Chapter.	Event.	Locality.
1864 Aged 45	XXII	Working Men's College. March, death of his father	Denmark Hill
	XXIII	Some parts of *Crown of Wild Olive* and *Sesame and Lilies* delivered as lectures	Manchester
		Arrival of Joan Agnew	Denmark Hill
		Attends home séances. Dec. at	Winnington
1865 Aged 46	XXIV	*Ethics of the Dust.* Lecture to Working Men's College. Study of Architecture	Denmark Hill
1866 Aged 47	,,	Asks Rose La Touche to marry him. Death of Mrs. Carlyle and of Lady Trevelyan. Geology and botany. Eyre Defence Committee	,, Neuchâtel
1867 Aged 48	XXV	Rumours of a marriage with Rose Notes first 'failure of health'	Denmark Hill
		Time & Tide. LL.D. and Rede Lecture	Cambridge
		July and August in	The Lakes

Date.	Chapter.	Event.	Locality.
1868 Aged 49	XXV	May, lecture in Dublin. Speaks at Social Science Congress. Longfellow.	Abbeville
		Unemployment	Denmark Hill
1869 Aged 50	XXVI	End of Term of Probation with Rose. She still irresolute. Too many irons in the fire. Writes *Queen of the Air*.	Venice
		Appointment to Oxford. Plan to harness torrents	Verona
		Rose would not speak	Oxford
1870 Aged 51	,,	Rose's book of poems. Evangelicalism. 1st Oxford lectures as Slade Professor. 'Tired and ill.' Inaugural lecture, February.	Oxford
		May, tour to	Italy
		July, driven home by outbreak of Franco - Prussian War	Denmark Hill
		Nov. and Dec., wrote *Aratra Pentelici*	Oxford
	XXVII	Published 1st vol. of *Fors*. July at	Matlock
		Dangerously ill	
		Buys Brantwood	Coniston

Date.	Chapter.	Event.	Locality.
		Death of his mother (Dec.)	Denmark Hill
		Reconciliation with Rose.	
		PART IV	
1871 Aged 52	XXVIII	Guild of St. George. St. George's Fund. Works on Mansion House Committee.	Denmark Hill
		Lectures on landscape	Oxford
	XXX	Dec., Denmark Hill sold. To	,,
1872 Aged 53	,,	Jan., street-sweeping experiment	London
		Feb. and March, lectures, *The Eagle's Nest*. Lecturing, moving about	Oxford ,, etc.
		Tour in Italy. Aug., Broadlands. Sept., refused by Rose, after being encouraged in Aug. Takes possession of Brantwood. Nov.,	
		Dec., Oxford lectures, *Ariadne Florentina*	Oxford
1873 Aged 54	,,	Feb., lecture on miracles. Oxford lectures, *Love's Meinie*.	,,

Date.	Chapter.	Event.	Locality.
		Autumn term lecture, *Val d'Arno*	
1874 Aged 55	XXX	Starts Hinksey diggings. Tour in Italy. Ill in Assisi, etc. Refuses Gold Medal of R.I.B.A. Returns	London
	XXXI	to London. Letters from Ireland. Renewed hope. Rose in London. Draws her. Oct., Rose very ill	
1875 Aged 56	,,	Lectures on Giotto, Cimabue, Fra Angelico, Botticelli. Hinksey diggings. May, *Academy Notes*. Death of Rose. Sept., Post-	Oxford
	XXXII	ing Tour through Yorkshire. Nov., lectures at	,,
		Sir Joshua Reynolds. Oct. and Dec., spiritualism at Broadlands. First part of *Proserpina*, *Deucalion*, and *Mornings in Florence*	Broadlands
1876 Aged 57	,,	St. George's Museum opened at	Sheffield

Date.	Chapter.	Event.	Locality.
		Re-elected Slade Professor	
		Aug., to Italy. At	Venice
1877 Aged 58	XXXII	*Guide to Venetian Academy. St. Mark's Rest. Laws of Fésole* begun. July, Whistler libel. Nov., Dec., Oxford lectures	Oxford
1878 Aged 59	XXXIII	Jan., visits to Prince Leopold at	Windsor
		To Gladstone at Hawarden. Writes preface to Turner Catalogue	London
		Feb., attack of mania. Lawsuit with Whistler. Resigns Slade Professorship	Brantwood
1879 Aged 60	,,	Better. Establishment of Ruskin Societies. Prince Leopold visits Sheffield Museum	
1880 Aged 61	,,	*Fors* resumed. Lectures at London Institution. Candidate for Glasgow Lord Rectorship.	London
		Aug., foreign tour	Amiens
1881 Aged 62	,,	Death of Carlyle	
		Feb., second illness	Seascale and Brantwood

Date.	Chapter.	Event.	Locality.
1882 Aged 63	XXXIII	Takes chair at a lecture	London
		March, third illness. July, Aug.–Nov., abroad with Mr. Collingwood	Sheffield Florence
		Makes acquaintance with Miss Alexander. December, Herne Hill. Lecture at London Institution, *Cistercian Architecture*	London
1883 Aged 64	XXXIV	Health better. Re-elected Slade Professor. Oxford lectures, *Art of England*. June, lectures in London on Miss Alexander, and on Miss Kate Greenaway (?)	Brantwood, Scotland, Oxford and Brantwood
1884 Aged 65	,,	Lectures at London Institution, *The Storm Cloud*. Oct., Dec., lectures, *Pleasures of England*, etc.	London Oxford
		Stays with Jowett. Lectures suspended	,,
1885 Aged 66	,,	Resigns Oxford Professorship. Writes *A Knight's Faith*, and chapters of	

Date.	Chapter.	Event.	Locality.
		Præterita. July, fourth illness	
1886 Aged 67	XXXIV	Feb., ill again. July, ill	Brantwood
1887 Aged 68	,,	Still ill. Aug., Folkestone and Sandgate. Occasional visits to	London
		(*Note*. Attack faded into a sort of general hostility.)	
1888 Aged 69	,,	Sandgate. July-Dec., last foreign tour. Dec., taken ill in	Paris
1889 Aged 70	XXXV	Finished *Præterita*	Seascale and Brantwood
1890–1900	,,	Brantwood	
	,,	Jan. 21, death	Brantwood

APPENDIX A

Turner had been made an A.R.A. when he was twenty-four – the earliest moment allowed by the rules of the Academy. Further, his work had long been fashionable among rich *dilettanti*. It was, for instance, typical of his position that he should have been one of the painters who worked for Beckford, the author of *Vathek*, and who helped him to adorn his notorious and extraordinary sham-gothic abbey at Fonthill.

Turner, when Ruskin got to know him, was a man who was easy if taciturn in company. He was used to admiration and to people being afraid of him; yet he was neither hard nor cold, but had a good technician's solid, comforting, unexaggerated sense of his own worth. He felt great devotion to one or two friends, and he cared very much about his work, trying now this, now that. For the rest, he could sit very comfortably drinking beer in public-houses, and equally comfortably in the music-room at Petworth, listening to the ladies singing and playing to the harp.

He had knocked about a great deal, and he loved his old father, who was a barber, and he had lost his first love. He had courted her when he was a poor boy, journeying round England on foot with his luggage on a stick, because he had been commissioned to paint the seats of the local gentry ready for engraving in a county history. On Sunday nights he would write to his sweetheart, but she had a cruel mother who kept back the letters because her daughter's William was so poor and tramped the country with his luggage on a stick over his shoulder. And so he lost her, because she thought herself forgotten.

So it happened that Turner in the eighteen-forties – old, successful, and rather lonely – showed himself to the world

as a tough old professional who set himself always to get as much money for his pictures as he could – unless, that was, when he liked them well enough to keep. He lived like a poor man for the most part, cherished his old father, and was supposed to be a miser. His buying of quantities of houses is famous, but they seem to have accumulated, chiefly because for years he could not house his old father to his mind. He lodged him, for example, in a house in Queen Anne Street. Then his father must have a garden in which he could dig, and so one was bought in Twickenham. Then his father worked too hard in the garden, so another house was bought in Harley Street. Finally, Turner seems to have owned dingy houses all over London. He had a habit of letting or lending parts of these houses to strange people out of his tramping past. They were people who seemed, to his patrons and biographers, as inexplicable as they were disreputable.

Some of the people he helped were genteel enough, however. Once, for example, he lent £10,000 to a 'gentleman who had been kind to him when he was a poor boy.' The gentleman – thus saved from selling part of his estate – paid him back. But the oddest part of the story is to come; for later on, when the gentleman was dead, his son also 'became embarrassed.' Turner again lent him £10,000, and was again paid back.

At the time when Ruskin met him, Turner had been twice offered £100,000 for his collection of his own pictures. Twice he had refused: some people put this down to a whim, and some supposed that it was because he meant to leave them in his will to the nation.

APPENDIX B

Ruskin's treatment of the theme of 'truth to structure' is perhaps worth instancing as the most famous of his technical architectural dicta. The point at issue is briefly this. Those

who favoured Ruskin and Gothic, in what was known as 'the battle of the styles' (as against classical architecture, and more particularly the Baroque), alleged as one of the main sins of the Renaissance, and above all of the Baroque method, of construction, that it tells lies – i.e., that the weights and thrusts in a classical building are often not borne as they seem to the eye to be borne, and that much of the actual work of edification is done behind the scenes.

In *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, Ruskin, in a long passage, lays it down that Architectural Truth is at all times to be sought, and that dishonesty in architecture is unpardonable. There must be no concealment of structural facts and no camouflage as to material.

Having said this, Ruskin has of course to account for the awkward fact that in the Gothic architecture of several periods (of which he was obliged to approve on other accounts) the weight and thrust of the roof are not in fact borne by the grouped columns which distinctly pretend to support it. They are carried instead by outside buttresses which are invisible from the interior. Ruskin, faced with this dilemma, is then obliged to say that you may make the spectator suppose that a *Roof* is supported in a fictitious way 'because the weight of a roof is a circumstance of which the spectator generally has no idea' (*Seven Lamps*, p. 65), and that it is all right, so long as the architect shows a support adequate to what the spectator *supposes* the weight of the roof to be. That the carrying of the weights in architecture shall satisfy the eye of the layman, rather than the knowledge of the surveyor, is, of course, all that Mr. Geoffrey Scott or any other advocate of the Baroque has ever asked for. His *Architecture of Humanism* read together with Ruskin's *Seven Lamps* will give a reader the two sides. They are put forward with entertaining violence. Incidentally *The Architecture of Humanism* is almost the only philosophical discussion of this art.

APPENDIX C

Ruskin's Letter to Professor Knight.

(Facsimile opposite this page)

OXFORD.
18*th Nov.* 83.

DEAR PROFESSOR KNIGHT,

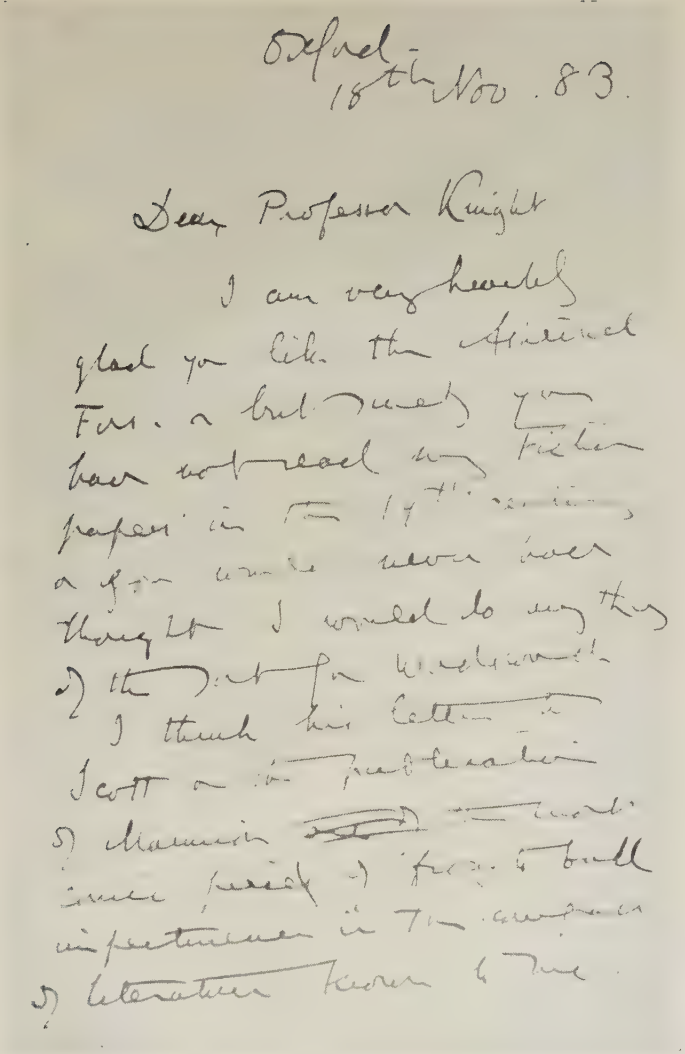
I am very heartily glad you like the (— ?) *Fors*, but surely you have not read my Fiction paper in the *Nineteenth Century* or you would never have thought I would do anything of the sort for Wordsworth. I think his letter to Scott on the publication of *Marmion* the most comic piece of frog-to-bull impertinence in the compass of literature known to me. I don't think I need trouble myself, neither, much after this last Glasgow affair about their University Elections. They *did* elect me at St. Andrew's, years ago – and then sent me word that some lawyer said I was ineligible because holding a Professoriate in Oxford. I held it for a political trick and was furious. I am taking some practical tutorship at Edinburgh, among the 'Societies' of the University – but will no more let my name be disgraced at elections.

Ever faithfully

RUSKIN.

Wordsworth's letter to Scott, which Ruskin so much disliked, is quoted in Knight's *Life of Wordsworth* (Vol. II, p. 105), and runs as follows:

> 'Thank you for *Marmion*, which I have read with lively pleasure. I think your end has been attained. That it is not in every respect the end which I should wish you to propose to yourself you will be well aware, from what you know of my notions of composition, both as to matter and manner. . . . In the circle of my acquaintance, it seems as well liked as the *Lay*, though



A PORTION OF A LETTER FROM RUSKIN TO PROFESSOR KNIGHT

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I have heard that in the world it is not so. Had the poem been much better than the *Lay* it could scarcely have satisfied the public, which, at best, has too much of the monster, the moral monster, in its composition. In the notes, you have quoted two lines of mine from memory, and your memory, admirable as it is, has here failed you. The passage stands with you.

"The swans in (or on) *sweet* St. Mary's lake."

The proper reading is –

"The *swan* on *still* St. Mary's lake." '

Wordsworth later referred to this in a conversation with the then Bishop of Lincoln, which is quoted by Knight.

'Walter Scott' (said Wordsworth) 'is not a careful composer. He allows himself many liberties . . . for instance, he is too fond of inversions . . . Walter Scott quoted as from me –

"The swans in (or on) *sweet* St. Mary's lake" –

instead of *still*, thus obscuring my idea, and betraying his own uncritical principles of composition.'

Ruskin's 'Fiction paper' was mainly an interpretation of Scott, and no doubt Professor Knight (Wordsworth's biographer, to whom Ruskin's letter is addressed) had suggested that Ruskin, who often quoted Wordsworth, should write a similar interpretation of him. The reference to the 'Glasgow affair' explains itself. The reader need not, however, be sure that, at the time when the muddle occurred over the complimentary election to St. Andrew's, Ruskin was really furious. In November, 1883, Ruskin was much more often furious than when the incident occurred.

Ruskin's handwriting was often both better and worse, than in the letter here given, but it is a reasonably typical

specimen of a handwriting that changed very little throughout a long life. The letter is the property of the Morgan Library, New York, and is reproduced by permission, a courtesy for which author and publisher tender their grateful thanks.

The author was allowed to inspect there a large body of Ruskin MS. and proofs of all periods.

The handwriting in the letter to Knight is, as has been said, characteristic. MS. is as a rule clear, but proof corrections are many and intricate.

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